

The Turn
of the Year



by
Andrew Phillips Love

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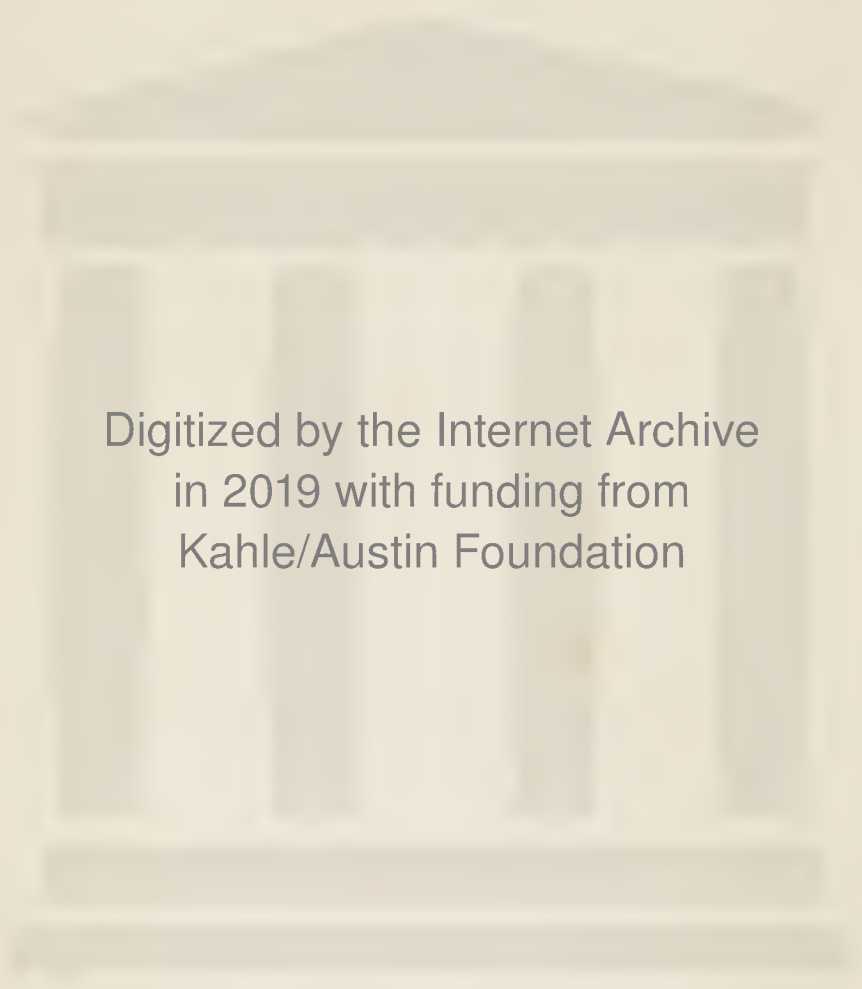
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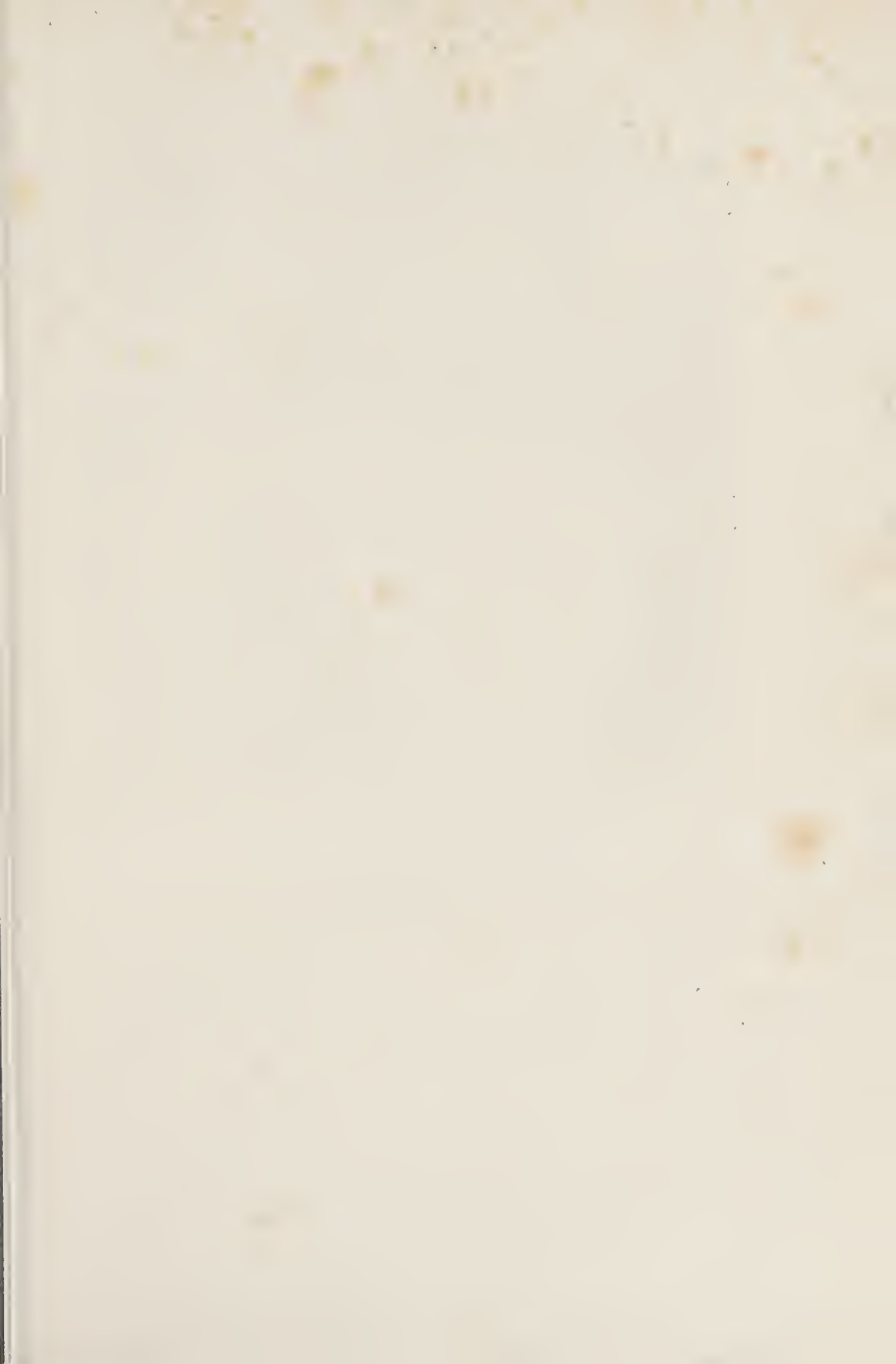
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The Turn of the Year

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"Here
we follow
the tracks."

C. M. M.

THE TURN OF THE YEAR

BY

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

ILLUSTRATED BY C M MANLY
A R C A

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FOREWORD



R. GROVE was born in Europe in 1872, his father a native of Sweden, his mother a Scotchwoman. As a young man he travelled widely. Having been in Canada in 1893 he came again in 1896. Since then this continent has been his teacher, his interest,—one might say his passion,—and his home. Once he had been speaking of Europe, of America, a little about the world, in the way in which men speak when they bare their vital thought in misgiving or in hope; he said: “There is a great anxiety in me and from this springs my Canadianism.”

Mr. Grove is Canadian. He is a graduate of the University of Manitoba and Principal of the High School in Rapid City in the province of Manitoba.

He has been writing for more than twenty-five years. He spoke once of his labour in mastering English to the point where he “cared to use it as a medium of expression;” when he began to write he tried Swedish, German, French; last, English. His manuscripts—novels, stories, sketches, poems—lie piled in drawers of his desk; his first published work in English, “Over Prairie Trails,” was issued last year from the McClelland and Stewart press. There are many other books unpublished or unfinished.

The present volume, “The Turn of the Year,” lies some-

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what in the vein of "Over Prairie Trails." Many who have read it in manuscript say it is the better book, a richer, a more various book. It gives again to the Canadian public that quality which so captivated in "Over Prairie Trails," the quality of style in the handling of the written word that makes for clarity, precision, limpidity, the quality that sets words to their right uses inevitably, making them the medium of expression, never permitting them to stand between the reader and the thing. In a sense there are no words on Grove's best pages; there is only the life of perpetual incident, the passing eternal glamour of existence, whether it be the existence of snow forms, cloud shapes, of rain and leaf and bird, or of men and women. Pebbles beneath brook water are not more clear or beautiful than some of the forms of life Mr. Grove presents. He belongs among those who know how to make words serve vision by clarifying it.

"Magic of style is creative: its possessor himself creates, and he inspires and enables his reader in some sort to create after him." So Matthew Arnold. Taking the comment in a somewhat special sense it is not folly to associate it with the writing of Mr. Grove. By the clarity of the style embodying his own vision Mr. Grove will assist us to a kind of creative seeing. No one will work through a section like "The Woods in June" in the present volume and fail to get a sense of the rush and plenitude of

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the swift prairie summer; the chapter is like a botany book on fire. No one will read the last section of the volume without being compelled into familiarity with the coming of seasonal change about the shores of a Canadian autumn lake.

In Mr. Grove's work the prairie finds its vindication as a place for the life of man. The Westerner, wishing to articulate his sense of the West will find Grove's words available, and oftentimes inevitable. The Easterner, prone by turns to regard the West as a phenomenon, an enigma, a romance, the key to prosperity, a disaster to Canadianism, may discover an interpretive protagonism that is informing and salutary.

It is a little unfair to Mr. Grove to say he is a nature writer. He is more than that. In his work nature is seldom, even momentarily, viewed apart from humanity. As it rains, there is a man watching the rain. As the seasons operate man is seen accommodating himself.

Mr. Grove's ability to portray, to convey, the eye of the poet in him making the observation of the scientist, his "scrupulous similitude," and his power to make men "pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile" constitute him a vivid and, one is tempted to say, a cosmic interpreter of all he sees and feels. His particular observation,—and he is always making such,—never stops with itself; its relationships are always a significant part of its value. The

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old Icelandic farmer behind the seeder in "The Sower," the Slav on the load in "Harvest," are poignantly part of the eternal process. These men, almost inarticulate in their preoccupation, indeed, by virtue of that very preoccupation, belong to the order of the world. They go on in profound fraternity under the same elemental compulsion that impels the thrusting grass blade and the seasonal change.

The present volume, "The Turn of the Year," seems to me to illustrate this sense of inscrutable tremendous relationships between man and nature. It is an old conception, perhaps open to much modification, further artistic explication of which will always have its public.

As there was a man in "Over Prairie Trails," a man under compulsion to laws within himself—how else may we speak but loosely?—and to laws in the prairie nature about him, so there are people in "The Turn of the Year." John and Ellen, their children, and nameless ones whom we know though they be nameless, these move on the face of the prairie amid its strange beauty and the pull and thrust of its forces not more and not less significant than human life should be until the Herculean pioneer labour is more nearly done.

The diversity of this book will constitute for some readers its chief charm. There are essays complete in themselves which please by a self-sufficing and vital life that is in them. But there is in "The Turn of the Year" also

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an underlying unification of intention and achievement sufficiently binding to make the work as a whole take on something of the nature of epic comment upon the life of the Canadian Prairie West. Certain readers will dip into "The Turn of the Year" and will then become immersed in it. This is because life—human life and the life of nature—has wrung a cry from Mr. Grove and the cry is in all his speech, sounding through the occasional strangely wielded idiom and across the less illumined paragraphs as well as in the finer passages. The cry is but expression once again of that dream of cultivated man which has set him at the task of comprehension through the generations.

ARTHUR L. PHELPS.

Wesley College, Winnipeg.

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I. THE THAW-UP

RETROSPECTION AND ANTICIPATION.



EARLY Spring is the season of youth. The first bare patch of ground, the first spongy mud: what an experience they are! It is almost too much to bear when we are getting old; it is indicative of almost too much to come. And yet, would we miss it? What takes hold of us when we see the first sign of the change of the seasons is something akin to tenderness; it partakes of compassion, of commiseration almost: there is still so much time to reflect; the first appearance of Spring does not sweep us off our feet, as its later progress does. And we do reflect: as if we foresaw at the birth of a child a career of great endeavour and great achievement; but bought at what cost! A future cost of suffering and disappointment, a cost of anger, strife, and tears. That is the way we older people feel it.

And yet this early spring is hope, joy, anticipation, and certainty of fulfilment. It is what we have been longing for: it is what we never would willingly miss.

It was immediately preceded by the first months of the year which took us into the deepest depths of winter. We are still only just emerging. And since things proceed slowly, we are apt to indulge in retrospection.

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The winter, perhaps, has been a hard one, perhaps unusually hard. Sometimes the first killing frosts come in the beginning, the first driving snowstorms before the middle of the month of October; and the definite freeze-up may seal the pores of the earth by the first of November. It is after such winters that we feel the approach of Spring most strikingly, most overwhelmingly. Such winters are memorable mostly by a peculiar kind of severity which asserts itself not so much by unusually low temperatures as by the unremitting dead level of below-zero weather which perseveres month after month. There is never a let-up from Christmas on; woodpile after woodpile dwindles away, for we keep the fires roaring day and night. In such winters you may sometimes feel that it is an adventure of nearly overweening daring to stay in the north of this western world. Shall we survive? Or will winter, who by that time appears to us almost as a stalking enemy, win out?

In shorter, more broken seasons, though they may be interspersed with days of much lower temperatures, with "cold snaps" of great violence, we are engrossed by the sports of winter. But in these persistent, unremittingly cold and stern seasons we do not care for them; instead, we have our eyes wistfully open for all signs of wild life. It is as if we desired to protect those among our fellow-creatures that are behindhand in their fight against hostile

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conditions of nature; and we do so desire; for no doubt these winters take terrific toll of them. The birds that stay with us—chickadees, partridges, snowflakes, downies, blue-jays, and Canada-jays—approach nearer to our houses as if they would huddle close for warmth. Rabbits enter the yard to hunt for the wastage of grain and to nibble at the hay in the stacks. When—rarely—we go out into the bush, we search for those trails of wild life that are revealed on the snow. Curiously, and with an almost tender interest we scan the fine, tube-like burrows which the brown woodmouse dug through the snow, down to her galleries that lead through the grass and through the matted leaves of yesteryear. Here we follow the tracks of the rabbits to where they have gnawed the boles of the young aspens; and we read the interlacing, busy-looking ribbon-spoors of the prairie-chickens where they have partaken of their fare of rose-hips, seeds, and low-growing buds.

On the few occasions when in such winters we go out for the mere pleasure and exercise of tramping, strange to say, we do not choose the bright, sunny days: they are too inexorably cold and blindingly blue and white. We prefer the cloudy days, or at least those with an overcast sky: the days that throw us back on ourselves and lure with dreams. Yes, we even prefer the days when the open, bare prairies are swept by bitter blizzards: for, here in the bush, so long as we keep to the east-west roads, the woods

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afford a certain amount of shelter which enables us to enjoy such weather, just as in summer we like to look on at a rain from the roofed-over porch of a house. The woods alternately groan and roar under the wind—as if the gale were now passing over them, merely bending the leafless tops till the strain becomes painful; and now through them, rousing the trees to a wild protest under its lashing, penetrating scourge. Perhaps, after having waded for an hour or so through the deeply accumulated snow in the bush itself, we emerge again on an east-west road and look about and along its vista. The snow which is driven by a pitiless northwind then forms a slanting roof over the space in which we are, at the height of the tree-tops, merely dusting down on us a light, filtering shower of shattered crystals. The trees on the north side stand like a wall, black if they are balsams, greenish-grey if they are aspens, and cut by columnar aisles of murky dusk; and the trees on the south side form another wall which is sprinkled over and, in places, coated with the star-dust of the snow. And as we lock along the grade, we suddenly feel as if we were in a long, narrow chamber or corridor, shut off from the world, in the east and the west, by the airy, drifting blankets of flying death.

But the days go by, and the weeks, and the months.

And then a time comes when impatience takes hold of us. That is mostly towards the end of March. Our im-

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patience is still rather aimless; it has not yet defined itself into a longing; we are not so much impatient for something as at something: impatient at winter's stolid pertinacity.

But one evening—of a dark, overcast evening—and in the gathering dusk, while perhaps we stand musingly by the stable-door or are looking out over the slightly, ever so slightly rolling landscape of the swamps to the west—suddenly there sounds across the glades of the bush in the north to the cottage in its margin the startling cawing of the crow.

We are electrified; we are a-quiver with a very definite longing now: that cawing has given our impatience an aim. And it has sharpened our retrospective vision: for we suddenly know that those birds that ran along the ridge of the road, ahead of our horses, a day or so ago, have been horned larks and not sparrows as we had presumed. Oh, how many feelings, how many anticipated sights flit through our brain as with rejuvenated muscles we turn to the house. Yesterday only there was no telling what we might not dream of: of southern seas and azure skies, of atolls sleeping under nodding palms, and of the seven wonders of the limestone caves, perhaps. But to-night we are back in the "here-and-now:" we dream of one thing only, of that which we wish to come, which we expect to come, which is, now, so positively sure to come.

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It is strange how even we who love the northern winter and who live at this edge of civilization partly—and chiefly, maybe—because we love it, begin to look restlessly forward to the final let-up; how we suddenly wait and hearken for signs of the coming spring. The longing for spring, you say, is universal wherever a winter exists. I know, I know. But nobody, I believe, who lives farther south, where winter is a mere incident, can understand how we, at these outposts, feel the summer, that short, ardent orgy of life in which only such members of the world's fauna and flora will thrive as can sum up their being in a quick, breathless growth, in a sort of revelry of germinating, blooming, fruiting. To us it sometimes seems at this season of the year, during those weeks which close the long reality of winter that we have lived through, as if previous summers might possibly have been nothing but a dream, as if there were some doubt as to which side will wrest the final victory from the other in the warring of the powers of nature. We are not surfeited at any time with the sweets of the seasons: our appetites are kept sharp; and what we lack in the breadth of our nature-experience, we make up for in depth, in intensity. I doubt whether people in the south ever become quite such ardent lovers of even the most trivial things in nature as we do. Our ears, eyes, sensations are sharpened to watch for the smallest, the seemingly most insignificant things. And to such

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as myself who desire to live their own lives, as it were, like mirrors only, catching and throwing forth again that which comes before their reflecting surface, these last days of winter are made sweet and melancholy by a strange feeling of infinite loneliness and by a longing for flower and bird which at last becomes almost painful.

One day—it is still before the end of March, and soon after that first indication of a promise was perceived: the cawing of the crow—we notice a strange, new quality in the feel of the air. Quite possibly it has been there before: but we did not notice it while winter was still too stern a reality. The calendar had been telling us all along that Spring was coming; and so had the sun been telling us, as he appeared higher and higher in the sky, and as he rose and set farther and farther north, till at last he rose and set due east and west. But we did not believe or gave no thought. Like an “evil and adulterous generation” we waited and sought after a sign. But the sign is given at last, and our eyes and senses are unsealed.

It is towards evening that we notice the strange new quality in the air. All day long the sky has been slightly, hazily overcast. It is still cold; but somehow there is a suggestion of moisture which is not quite so inexorably frozen into crystals of snow. The feel of the air—though it seems all the colder for that—is nearly as if it had been thawing. The illusion is so strong that just before dark

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we go out, to the corner of the road, where the big drifts lie piled into the edge of the woods like strongholds, eight and even ten feet high. But there is no crust on them as there would be had the thermometer at any time of the day risen ever so slightly above the freezing point.

That same night, after dark, when we go out on our evening chores, there is a great stir and commotion going on in the heavenly halls. All over the sky, from the very edge of the world in the north, and very nearly to the southern horizon, the northern lights are playing; broad bands of them which are streaming both to the north and to the south, as if they emanated from an imaginary common centre right in the zenith: a phenomenon which, I believe, is peculiar to the time of the equinoxes; at least I find it commented on in my notes only at this time of the year. The whole field of light is arranged in the exact likeness of an enormous magnetic field formed by two gigantic bar-magnets placed one north of the other, their opposing edges running from east to west; only that between these edges, where in a real magnetic field the lines of force would run thickest, there is nothing but the dark, immensely deep, blue void.

We do not know the significance of this phenomenon; but we accept it as one of the number of portents.

The very next time we awake in the morning we are apt to look out upon a world transformed. Yes, even before

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we look out we feel the change; for that impression of moisture in the air which drove us out of doors the night before has crystallised into something very definite, although it may be puzzling enough for the moment. But as soon as we look out, we understand. This is going to be a day of days: something infinitely precious is going to happen; something which we do not care to avow to ourselves in so many words: words are clumsy instruments with which to express our anticipations: and there is also the fear of a great disappointment which somehow would seem less hard to bear if hope was not prematurely expressed.

What we see when at last we stand on the porch is this: Over the lower reaches of the open, swampy glades to the west there stretches a dense, snow-white mist, shading off overhead into strange, flocculent clouds which look at the same time familiar and foreign to us: familiar because we have seen them before, and often; foreign, because it was so long ago when we saw them last. They are flocculent; but somehow they have a firmer texture than the loose, cottony snowclouds ever have in winter when they are going to shower the light, sparkling dust of crystals. Behind, beyond, above them, there stand, perhaps, large, rounded, sharply outlined clouds resembling thunderheads in texture and contour; compared with them those masses in the skyey foreground are indeed still characterless, ill-

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defined, and spongy. And over this whole array there bends a flat, whitish vault.

The earth itself still presents the aspect of middle winter; and it looks perhaps very dreary and nearly desolate to us now; but the sky is a summer sky—such as we might see after a warm, sultry night during which we have tossed about on our beds, half dozing only and chasing ourselves through labyrinthine dreams.

At ten o'clock it is apt to clear up, though probably long, streaky threads of cloud will persist, floating through the upper reaches of the air like enormous gossamers and dulling now and then the sharp edge of the sunshine. It is warming up, too; suddenly, and to an astonishing degree; in a few places, where the cruel sweep of the winter-winds has never allowed the snow to accumulate beyond the depth of an inch or so, the brown earth, loose, spongy, and wet, looks through, thawing; our roofs begin to keep up a pitter-patter of dripping drops.

Thus the world drifts through a sleepy, dreamy kind of noon, with not a breath stirring anywhere.

But about three o'clock in the afternoon a sharp, sudden gust of wind breaks loose from the south, as if something which has long resisted there had unexpectedly given way, fleeing in sheer panic before invading forces which are unseen and unappraised as yet. Then, as abruptly, this sudden wind stops again.

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All over, the sky clouds up, the vapours condensing everywhere, so it seems, in the wide halls of the atmosphere.

An hour or so later, when these vapours have become a dense shroud of a curiously yellow, dirty colour which so far stands in strange contrast to the pure white of the snow, a few rare drops of rain fall, with great intervals between the drops, horizontally as well as vertically, their most striking characteristic being their very large size. This affects us like a wondrous phenomenon, like one of nature's miracles to see which is well worth travelling over a quarter of the globe if it cannot be seen without that. It goes on for half an hour or so, the strange quality of the air meanwhile intensifying—a fit setting for the wonder of the rain—till everything is a murky, yellowish grey; even the light takes on a yellowish tinge so that even the snow no longer looks white.

Then the rain becomes denser till it is a washing rain, falling quite perpendicularly. The huge snow-drifts at the edges of the woods seem to shrink as the body of an animal shrinks under a shower of beating blows from which it cannot escape. But the buildings stand glistening, as if they exulted under their first rising-down; and they look as if they expanded under it. The lichens on scattered rocks and on the bark of the trees glow in immensely intensified colours: bluish-green, dusky grey, and rusty

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brown. Another half hour of this, and a sharp fall in temperature makes itself felt by our senses.

But before even the dusk of evening has settled down, the rain has become mixed with snow, forming peculiarly heavy, sleety, hard-hitting, yet half liquid pellets which seem to penetrate our clothes with darts of cold; and when night falls, it is apt to be one of the darkest nights of the year. It is snowing outright once more, heavily, with those large, loose, floating flakes which characterise the soft-footed snow-fall of more southern winters: that snow-fall which melts as soon as it reaches a brown, warm earth. A little later everything begins to freeze again; but the frost apparently comes from below, for the temperature of the air is apt to hover just around the freezing-point. If we go to the ditches and throw a snowball in, we shall find that they are covered with water which splashes up. But if we take a lantern along, we shall also find that already long, slender needles of icy crystals shoot out into the slush of the surface.

This is the first attrition attack which Spring undertakes against the established rule of Winter. Spring comes and flees: he pursues a guerilla warfare; and if there were a gazette of the seasons, Winter would no doubt publish a victory to the world. As it is, he advertises the defeat of Spring before morning. A howling northwind sweeps the sky clear over night, with a sharp fall in temperature

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to below zero; it blows the new snow into new, sheltered drifts behind the old ones; and at dawn the world reminds once more of those inexorable mid-winter days when, after a blizzard, the sun shines ineffectually and unconcernedly down on a blinding waste. Little remains to testify of the previous day's thawing and rain: little indeed, but something nevertheless. For there is this difference still: whereas in mid-winter the surface of the snow, blown and moulded by the plastic force of the wind, is loose and powdery and, though sparkling and glittering in its minute, component parts, yet lustreless as a whole, it is now glazed over with a thin crust of rough, finely mammillated ice which is highly polished. You cannot bear looking over it against the sun, for it reflects the light with a blinding glare. And there is also a difference in colour: wherever you see the small drifts of new snow: behind the woodpile, behind the trunks of the tree, and behind the older drifts, they are pure white; but this crusted old snow has a distinctly yellowish tinge.

The trees, too, are glazed over, an eighth to a quarter of an inch thick; every bough, every branch, and every trunk is encased in ice. The aspens look strangely gay through this glazing, points of light glittering and glistening all over their stems; and the larches and spruces, rare as they are in our neighbourhood, deserve a visit by reason of their covering of lichens and mosses which have for the time,

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preserved their colour-intensity ordinarily bestowed by nothing but rain. Just as a drawing or etching assumes a new kind of life when viewed under glass, exhibiting a depth of perspective and a delicacy of touch hardly suspected before, thus every detail of bark and coloured growth stands out more plastically and strikingly under this glaze of ice.

If we live in the country, we are apt to see evidence soon of how sharp the frost has been overnight; for likely we shall see the children, on their way to school, merrily sliding along over the ice of those very ditches from which last night the water splashed up when we threw a snowball into them.

THE BATTLE.

This recrudescence of winter after the first serious skirmish with spring is apt to last a week or longer; it is apt to take us to the very end of March, and perhaps even into the first few days of April. Strange to say, if the winter was hard, this is the time when our country boys and girls indulge in winter-sports. It is cold, it is true; but the sun is too powerful already not to warm the afternoons up at least. There is also, for the first time since Christmas, clear ice in abundance. The ditches by the roadside have collected the water of the first great thaw; and they have expanded into long, narrow, frozen lakes which reach up

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to the level of the roadway, and on the other side far into the willow-brush of the forest margins or of the homestead clearings in the bush. These large sheets of ice slowly become concave moulds, for the water keeps on running out from underneath, slowly finding its way to the level of creeks and swamps and lakes.

I remember one day when late in the afternoon I walked along a bushgrade straight towards the setting sun. The ice on both sides of the road, being perfectly smooth and level and virgin, looked black like a mirror of jet. At my end of the district solitude ruled supreme; and the silence was broken only by the occasional discordant and impertinent scream of the jay: fit winter-sound to match the howling of prairie-blizzards. Every now and then I saw a few horned larks running in twos, threes, fours along the frozen ridges of bare ground which alone, amid the long, ribbon-like ice-pools, gave indication of where in summer the road would be. There they fed on the droppings of horses, swiftly running along as I approached, and finally taking wing with a whistled "tsee-tsee!"

But as I put the miles behind me and neared a district where farms clustered thickly on both sides the road, in close imitation of an old-country village though there was no town, the silence of the woods was gradually displaced by the joyful noise and shouting of children. And as, through the gathering dusk, I looked out along the polished

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surface of the ice, a strange sight caught my eyes. Huge, monstrous spiders seemed to be swiftly gliding along over an element which at that distance mimicked the atmosphere. When I came closer, I could see what they were. About a dozen children, boys and girls, lying flat-bellied on their sleighs, with their feet raised up behind, were pulling and pushing themselves about by the help of large spikes which they held, points downward, firmly in their hands, as they stuck them into the smooth mirror underneath. Thus propelled, they were shooting about with great speed, hugely and noisily enjoying themselves in this half active, half passive motion. With their elbows bent upward, their crooked-up arms looked indeed like monstrous spider's-legs.

On such days the temperature is at last apt to rise again towards night. New vapour-sheets form in the atmosphere; and at dusk it often snows quietly and heavily. We are always surprised when we see new snow at this time of the year; though it should not surprise us. The weather is mostly that of mild winter days. But the water from the ditches continues to run out; and the roof above continues slowly to give way, cracking along the edges with loud reports like pistol shots. In places even this new transparent ice which in incident light looks black—on account of the depth of water underneath—begins to be opaquely white, for it splits into fine, lamellated sheets with

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thin layers of air between. As it hangs over the diminishing masses of water from bank to bank, like a yielding cover, it forms a flat trough, as if it were preparing itself to become a new channel for the water that will soon accumulate in further thaws.

At this time—about the first of April—our longing for Spring has become a passionate yearning. It becomes almost resentment; for Winter's reluctance to yield seems senseless and cruel tyranny now.

And yet we are by no means at a standstill. Even while this revival of winter is taking place, little, seemingly insignificant things occur which are well worth watching. The running-out of the water from the ditches is only one of many things: but it is in itself significant enough. More striking, more cheering is the first sight of the third of our migratory summer visitors to arrive: the slaty junco. A little flock of them is suddenly seen about the house where they cling to the tops of some tall weeds that rise above the snow and deftly ply their mandibles, moving them horizontally over each other, from right to left, while they roll the seeds out of their husks. If you watch closely, you will see the pink of the little tongue whenever the mandibles move: a sight, trifling as it is, which never fails to fill me with a rush of sympathy for all our wild life on the plains and in the woods.

Whenever snow falls during this interregnum of the

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seasons—as it frequently does—it is as if Winter, anticipating his defeat, wished to cover up all signs of a battle that has already been fought: as if he desired to choke up hope by covering all earth with ever new palls of death.

And then, by signs that are almost too minute to be noticed singly, we become aware of the fact that a second major battle is imminent and unavoidable. For one thing, it becomes quite clear that Winter is fighting at a disadvantage and that his handicap consists in this: whenever it snows, the temperature rises; for it always rises with a fall in barometric pressure, at least in winter; and so, whenever it snows, Spring is there, waiting for an opening, for an opportunity to raise the temperature just a little more, just to the fatal point where Winter's weapon, snow, will turn into Spring's weapon, rain. Almost invariably the snow-fall begins with fine, thin flurries, consisting of fine, thin, spindle-shaped crystals strung with minute spherical droplets of ice; and almost invariably, as it proceeds, these flurries turn into large, soft flakes of star-shaped crystals. And one day, when everything is opportune, with a sudden sally of warm southwind, Spring turns the snowstorm into a storm of driving rain. This rain still feels inclement; it would be hateful were it not for what it presages to us. But in the first attrition attack rain turned into snow, and Winter conquered; when snow

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turns into rain, that is the first of the real victories of Spring.

The mere fact, however, that there is a fight is in itself significant. In describing it, we are everlastingly tempted to personify. When summer appears, spring steps back; when winter comes, fall vanishes without a struggle. But neither winter nor summer yield willingly to their seemingly weaker brethren.

Spring displays his warfare during the two weeks that follow, from the beginning to the middle of April, in the most striking manner. The battle is on: sullenly Winter fights back, night after night; smilingly Spring takes from him spot after spot in daytime.

The ditches and roads, the fields and drifts absorb our attention for the moment; for the fall of snow and rain has ceased.

Under the crust formed over the level snow by the first great thaws the winter cover still lies white and granular. Every day now it thaws; and every night it freezes. Every day the ditches fill with water everywhere; and every evening, from about five o'clock on, large, long needles form around their edges. The water in these ditches, except in the shallowest parts, does not yet warm up above the freezing point, not even under the noon-day sun; for everywhere snow and ice are still in contact with the water; and so the fall in temperature coincident upon the approach

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of the setting of the sun is quite sufficient to bring about a new freezing. If you watch for five or ten minutes, you can see those crystals grow; occasionally, where a colder streak of air runs over a ditch, they will shoot out into the open water with great speed.

In the low spots, where the water gathers in daytime, great ponds are forming. The water reaches them either through the ditches themselves where it is now running along in the concave icetroughs as in channels specially devised which it is, however, slowly wearing away; or through curious structures like canyons and riverbeds cut by the rills and currents into the deeper drifts of the snow. Along these imitation canyons and riverbeds, successive lower levels of the water in the streams have left their traces in shelving terraces of former shores and beaches.

The grade and the level ground on the fields begin to be blotchy. Large, bare spots appear which are muddy at noon and which crust over with a tough, but still yielding film of frozen earth at night. The meadows are dappled; they look like the plumage of a moulting bird or like the fur of a mangy animal when the season changes.

Where, in the highest spots, the ground has begun to dry superficially, it is granular and spongy; for the repeated freezing of the water with which it was impregnated has increased the distance between particle and particle by its expansion. A large stone-slab with a crack

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in it whose width by actual measurement one fall amounted to one sixteenth of an inch gaped during the following spring with a gap an inch and a quarter wide; and already, from the water which trickled over it, the sediment settled down into the crack, filling it with alluvial soil for grass and weeds to grow in and to continue the work of disintegration by the acid etching of the roots. The whole soil seems to be in a state of flux. This is the milling-season of nature, in which she grinds the grist on which the plants will feed.

Over the great snow-drifts, the ice-crust is at first strengthened by the repeated thawing and freezing; for, so long as the crust is in contact with the snow, it gains in thickness every night; and since, like glass, the clear ice allows the heat-rays of the sun to pass through without perceptibly warming up itself, no proportional part of it is thawed in daytime. The more and more coarsely granular, bristly, but still opaquely white snow underneath, however, melts away and shrinks. So, at first, the whole mass of the great drifts simply sinks down, icy cover and all; and below it, little rills of water dig and drill and tunnel away: the disintegration is underneath, not at the surface. But once the crust touches ground all around, as the snow shrinks still further, the glazed vault, remaining at its level, becomes underhollowed. If at night you throw a small stone or a bit of frozen snow on it, the sound is

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that of a handful of dry peas spilled on the floor of a room; and the small missile scuds and skates along as if it had suddenly come to life. And finally, as wider and wider edges of bare soil appear at the margin, inside the vault, and as to the radiating heat from the sun above there is added the reflected, radiating heat from below, besides currents of warmer air set up by the warming soil, these hollow ice-moulds are worn to the thinnest, wafer-like structures that can be imagined; till they, too, at last begin to collapse. Then snow is left in masses only in the margin of the bush where the very highest drifts had been piled up and where now the dense stem-thickets of the shrubs yield shelter and shade.

And the roads at last become a spongy, bottomless mud.

When this stage has been reached, another phase of nature once more attracts us. So far only crows, horned larks and juncos have been telling us by their arrival that the progress of the season has been watched by others as closely, as anxiously as by ourselves. Now we are apt in our walks suddenly to run across a line of ants; and if we follow the line to the hill, we shall see its summit swarming with busy life. The ants, it is true, do not yet venture very far from home except within two or three hours on either side of noon. But we greet them joyously, as life resurrected from death.

The partridges, too, feed high in the trees now; and



"There were thousands of them
wheeling about. Crows."

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thus they give notice of the fact that buds are stirring. Especially in the evening, if we walk along, just after sunset, through the chasms of our poplar forests, on logging trails, with our eyes raised to the amber-colored western sky, we shall see them outlined, clinging to the highest twigs of the aspens and busily pecking away at the buds for a hurried meal before night.

When we meet rabbits, it is no longer exclusively in the bush; and as they scamper along in its margin and on roadsides, it will strike us one day that they have donned their summer-coat of greyish-brown.

But still, among all our migratory birds, the crow seems to monopolise the landscape. They come sailing from the south in huge flocks, now, by the thousand; and they fall into our bush like invading armies.

One night in spring they held a veritable hobo-meeting in the bush north of my house. The whole woods seemed vocal with their cawing which was so continuous and obtrusive that it reminded me of the strident summer concert of the frogs and the toads in the swamp to the west. I went out to investigate, following the road which skirts the western edge of my yard; and soon I came upon the scene of this particular commotion.

There were thousands of them; and they were all wheeling about over the tree tops in great excitement and cawing as if engaged in a lively and acrimonious alterca-

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tion. I watched to find out, if I could, what might be the object of their quarrel; and after a while a large flock—which, however, was only a small fraction of the total number—separated out and flew east, cawing the while as if calling and asserting the rights of a minority. The rest of them settled down to roost in the tree tops; and for a moment or so there was silence in this assembly of the majority. All I heard was the diminishing clamour of the secessionists. But this suddenly increased again. Darkness was rising by now: out of the woods and from the eastern abodes of night. But nevertheless, as soon as the distant clamour from one receding changed back again into one approaching, the whole tribe of the stand-pat majority rose once more into the air; and at the same moment I saw the secessionist flock returning to join them again. For a moment there was a climax of noise and excited wheeling when the two parties coalesced; it almost looked as if they clashed in battle royal. But then the impression crystallised into this: that a deafening majority cried out in discordant triumph, “We told you so! We told you so!” while the silent minority tried to slink in among them before they joined in the chorus as if they had never seceded at all, till at last every one of them was expostulating against nobody in particular. Then, quite abruptly, but in marvellous coordination of movements, the whole of the

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now re-united tribe went silent and sank away into the leafless bush.

Such is the crow; and by the second week in April we are apt to have him and lark and junco. But then the robins appear; and one day we think we hear a meadow-lark; and suddenly the quacking of ducks obtrudes upon our notice. Our first definite realisation of the return of the more melodious among our migratory bird visitors is apt to come like a sudden burst of light into persistent darkness. Never yet have I felt sure that I saw bird after bird as soon as they arrived. Always I suddenly became aware of the fact that numbers of them were with us; and when I searched in my memory, I always seemed to be conscious of having heard sounds and seen shapes that very likely must have proceeded from or been indicative of at least half a dozen different birds. Very likely that is an illusion and nothing else. And yet, quite a few of our summer-birds seek the cities, towns, and villages first before they venture into the open country; there they find abundance of shelter and perhaps also food in the wastage of man. So one might really hear some familiar call, see some suggestive motion of body or wing when chance or necessity takes one to post-office or store. The fact remains that every spring one day I suddenly make up my mind to go out and look for new arrivals; and also, that I hardly ever, in this first search, see less than half

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a dozen newcomers at a time. This search may be occasioned by some definite and well-recognised call or by some definite though perhaps incomplete sight.

I go east, along the grade, perchance, to where, a mile from my house, the woods recede on the southside, opening up into a meadow which is fenced for a pasture. The bush to both sides is noisily vocal, of course, with the cawing of crows; and perhaps I now hear quite distinctly and unmistakably the quacking of ducks from the sloughs to the north. But when I reach that meadow, unexpectedly, from quite close by, like a great overwhelming joy, I hear the familiar, cheerfully whistling flute-note of the meadow-lark. I jerk my head about; and truly, there he sits on a low charred stump, right next to the road, or perhaps on a fence-post; and his breast is the brightest of all bright yellows; and like black velvet the crescent lifts itself off from the throat. And the very same moment I see two robins chasing each other through the yellow grass of last year's growth, hopping low for three steps, and then straightening out and curiously and peeringly raising their heads. And farther afield two large owls skirt the meadow, flying low over the underbrush, while a little ahead of them, and somewhat higher, a hawk sails along, a marsh-hawk, with white tail-coverts distinctly barring his back. Vesper-sparrows flit in and out along the margin of the bush, with each spurt in their flight displaying

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the two white feathers that streak their tail. And as I turn, three or four ducks are revealed in a line against the blue sky, winging it north.

I am not a gun-man; but such sights and sounds never fail to quicken my pulse and to sharpen my senses. And so I fasten my eyes on the bush; for over it, too, a change has come. The willow-canes to the east somehow look a little redder, yellower, and greener, according to their kinds; and as I look to the west, along the vista of the road, the dense wall of poplar forest is as if frosted over with a greenish, smoky haze which has something strangely suggestive of life in it. If I cross the ditch to the north of the road and look more closely, I shall find that the white bloom is coming out of the aspen boles, as if sweating out; but, so far, on their south sides only, whereas the north side still shows the dull, greyish-green of the winter-coat. And while I am still examining the stems, perhaps a small red squirrel, looking rather scraggy and shabby, as it befits the season, but very full of life indeed, begins to chatter away at me from a tree branch overhead.

Jubilate Deo! Spring has come!

Another impression obtrudes these days as we watch the earth. It is as if the ground were expanding, stretching, luxuriously, in the softer air. Here on the ridges the road, the ditches even are dry and bare, soft and spongy; wagon-wheels cut deep ruts into the soil. The snow-banks

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in the corners of the bush are shrinking rapidly. From the swamp to the west the deafening trilling of toads sounds across.

And blackbirds arrive; and Pasque flowers peep through the ground on the warmer glades; and a few green stalks begin to show in the yellow of last year's grass.

The frosts at night mark the last bold sallies into the open which Winter is going to make against life. He is being beaten all along the line. Where he is not yet fleeing in headlong flight, he has dug himself in; but even the ground is thawed to a depth of six inches except where the shade cast by boles and brush is dense and dark. We need rain, rain, to drive the winter out of his very last stronghold, the ground.

THE VICTORY.

And mostly, just when the third week of April makes room for the fourth one, that rain comes at last: it is the third of the season; and if we are lucky; it is not a mere rain but a shower; and if we are doubly lucky, it comes with the full accompaniment of thunder and lightning. This rain ushers in the growing season: that season in which the meadows turn green and humble flowers spring in profusion—in which trees grow their young shoots and seeds germinate apace. And the rain that starts them off, if it is to do the greatest possible amount of good, must come in instalments.

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One year, on the twenty-second of April, two days before the farmer's traditional commencement-date of seeding operations, and after a night of soft, caressing southwinds, we had a calm morning, with that delicious, balmy mildness in the air which makes us relax so that we could wish to sit on a stump all day and look at the clouds as they sail overhead. There lies over the landscape, brown as it is, and almost free of snow, an impression of whiteness which it is hard to explain: it is the whiteness of a new atmosphere; the whiteness of airiness, even in the bush where no foliage as yet arrests the eye. It is a morning which makes the meadowlark break into carols of song and the robins to chase each other in the young game of love.

But about three o'clock in the afternoon it suddenly clouds up, with no wind in the lower layers of the atmosphere, as if merely a chill were running in ripples through the heights above. And while this uniform veil of vapour thickens—like a surprise, like the almost unexpected and long delayed fulfilment of a promise, a warm, beating shower of rain begins to fall. Twice before we have had rain; but we have not, so far, had a shower: that sudden, plentiful, lashing downpour from the heavenly locks. Voluptuously we fill our lungs while it lasts, though it does not last long, not more than five minutes perhaps; but while it lasts, a great deal of warm water falls. The large

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and heavy drops come thick, and they fall straight down, with not the slightest slant in them.

An hour later, the temptation becomes too strong for us; we go out into the bush, following footpaths which we ourselves have established. Already the ground feels different here among the trees where the paths and glades are overgrown with a thin sod of matted roots interspersed with stones; even yesterday there was no mud here; but still we sank with every step deep into the dry, loose mould: now the soil is firmer, more resilient, less permanently yielding to the foot; the rain has beaten all the sponginess out of the ground.

It has largely cleared up, and I am deceived into the belief that the rain is over. But when, in following what was half a foot and half a cattle path, I come to a wide, open glade in the bush, I look about and scan the horizon that shows through the trellis work of leafless boughs. Long lines of light gray cloud lie low in the north: the vessels from which our shower was poured. Feathery, downy cirrus formations cover the southern half of the sky overhead; but low down, in the south-west, huge, dark, slate-coloured banks are massed, with rounded, bulwark-like, whitish edges; and they are rising fast, impelled by a squall as yet unfelt by myself. I start for home at once, for I am not dressed for rain; but before I even reach the edge of the glade, I can see the streaky, slanting ribbons of

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rain descending from those cloud-banks in the distance. Farther to the east, at the edge of the storm, light grey rolls or welts of cloud are detaching themselves, brewing, moving like enormous breakers, surging forward and continually growing larger. Distant rumblings sound across.

When I plunge back into the bush, walking very fast now, almost running, the trees stand quiet, as if they were waiting, bracing themselves in breathless expectation.

Then a rush of wind breaks loose, with the roar of the surge in the bush; the trees bend over for a second, as if in salutation. A few crows are the only birds on the wing, flying low over the tree tops, silent; and in the sudden impact of the squall they veer and careen, to counteract the disturbing influence, and then shoot straight ahead, sailing before the wind. A single one of them sits on the dead branch of a tall poplar and holds on: he looks strangely hushed and humped up. Apart from these not a bird is visible anywhere.

The squall subsides, and an immense, unearthly silence falls like a cloak over all creation; and as if to accentuate the stillness, a duck, perhaps, sounds her quack-quack from some brake in the bush, or in the far-away swamp to the west a frog pipes weakly.

The clouds, however, with no wind accompanying them down here, still come sweeping on, nearer and nearer, as I flit along through the bush.

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Then, just as I emerge on the very last glade, the one on which my house stands, a few hundred feet to the south, for the first time in the season I see a brilliant burst of lightning, right in front of me, leaping in a forked pencil from cloud to cloud, followed by a bellowing thunder-clap. I have stopped in my tracks, as is my custom, when I saw the flash, to wait for the thunder. And though it follows with unexpected promptness, showing how near the storm-centre is, I yet have time to notice its peculiar quality. It is loud, it is crushing; but it is soft, not harsh; there is no anger in it; it is like the loud, good-natured bark of a very large, long-haired dog. And the next moment the clouds settle down on us like a huge, shaggy beast. Pouring rain roars down, shot with hail; milder flashes of lightning and rumbling thunder seem to run through wide, reverberating halls overhead. And then we, the woods, the world seem to be drowned in the clouds.

The rain and the accompanying murky darkness last perhaps for half an hour. Then the light seems to return from all sides at once. The vast, dome-like clouds roll together into great black masses; lighter layers appear above through their ragged rents. They all fly fast and travel to the northeast, but still with no wind perceptible at our levels. Far in the east quiet is restored already; and a luminous, lightly overcast sky seems like the regret that follows a revel.

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So far it was the fag end of Winter. Now the very last remnants of snow in the corners of the bush by the road lie like sorry, dirty corpses slain by Spring, the beautiful youth. Now things will stir in the ground: Life is resurrected: the world is saved!





Goes about his chores.
First he splits wood.

II. THE SOWER



THE field behind the yard which is flanked by dense thickets of young poplar growth stretches away to the north, perfectly level, flat like a table-top as far as it is cleared. Beyond it, the bush of second-growth poplar forms the horizon.

On the large, roomy yard which is covered by a sward of short grass, an old man goes about, puttering at his chores in the light of the rising sun. First he splits wood and carries it to the door of the log-shack that stands some fifty feet or so from the winding bush-trail in front. Then he tinkers about at the old, rickety seeder, trying the shafts to which two axe-squared poplar poles are spliced. And at last he goes to the stable where three horses are munching away at their straw, mixed with some hay. Two of the horses are old; the third is a colt a little over three years old. The colt nickers when the old man enters and impetuously turns to the oat-box in the corner of his stall and licks it. He is the only one of the three that throws his head when the harness descends on his back.

As the man moves about, an onlooker would be struck by a peculiarity of his gait. His legs seem too short for his body, his arms too long: there is something ape-like in his movements. His face is framed by a grey, scraggy

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beard; but his upper lip and the front of his chin are bare though not freshly shaved; in fact, they look as if they were clipped with a pair of scissors rather, for the bristly stubble that covers them is of uneven length. The type is unmistakable: it is Icelandic.

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He was a sailor once, in his own, far country. Inconceivable though it is, he once was young: young at least in years, though never young in life, for he went to work and to toil at the age of twelve. And one day, when he had thus been a toiler for almost a lifetime, he took a wife to himself, much younger than he was; and she bore him three children. It was when the children had arrived that the desire to give up his wandering life became overpowering. He gave himself over to brooding; and slowly his brooding became articulate. He thought of his own youth and how he had gone out to toil on the sea when merely a child. He hated to think that his little ones should have to do the same. He shared the prejudice of his class that, if he could give them what he considered to be an education, they would not have to do hard work. He heard of Canada and the United States: homes of freedom across the seas. He longed to go on the land. Land was given away there to those who would till it. He pondered over that for three more years.

And then, one day, he announced to his wife that he

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had made up his mind to emigrate. The young woman who was about thirty at the time did not like this plan. But, for another year, at every home-coming from his trips across the northern sea, he kept talking about it till the thought became familiar and less repulsive to her. And at last they came and settled on the prairie of the west.

He took up the homestead in the bush and built a log-hut. And he began at once to clear some land. But in summer he worked out for such of his countrymen as were already established, while his wife stayed at home with the children; and in winter, when he could look after the little ones, his wife went out, to the city, to work in the homes of well-to-do people.

In a money-sense, she did better than he; she was capable, honest, and clean; and the work was like play to her. But he, meanwhile, was clearing land and began to break it. A cow and a team of oxen appeared on the farm. The trouble was that she began to like the city: the company she found and the shallow ease of life. She could not see that he was building up capital; wages that come and go looked alluring to her. And so she began nagging at him to leave the farm and to come with her to the city. He listened and shook his head.

Thus a few more years went by. And there came a time when the work on the field demanded his full, unstinted strength. That summer the work of milking three

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cows, of feeding the pigs, and of tending the kitchen-garden fell to the woman's share. He, too, it is true, worked from four in the morning till after dark. But while he worked, his vision was of the farm; her vision was a comparison between this slavery and the city. Man and wife found themselves estranged.

The children meanwhile had grown; and there was no school as yet, for there were only three settlers in the bush so far, and they were miles apart. The woman had become acclimated in speech and thought; and as summer went on, this dumb, Icelandic man became a horror to her.

In the fall, when he proposed that she should stay for the winter, she refused. She went; and she took the oldest girl, who was sixteen by now, along; and shortly after, she came back for the other two children. He did not put up a fight; he drove them to town in an all-day trip with his slow oxen; but he looked wistfully after the midnight-train that took them away; and he never saw any of them again. He was sixty years old at the time.

Next spring he found that he could not handle all the work on the farm; and so he disposed of the cattle, the oxen, and pigs; and with the money he bought two mares.

Henceforth he worked on, clearing a little every year, buying mower and binder, and seeding the land that was broken. In the beginning, he was still thinking of his chil-

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dren in all he did. But he ceased dreaming of a better house: the log-shack was good enough for him, now that he was all alone. Then he heard, in one of the yearly letters which he received, that his wife was doing well in the city, she and the girls hiring out as domestic servants, and the boy working in a garage; and so they began to fade from his life and became a memory, detached from himself; and their place was taken by a strange idea in his mind: he was working for God, not for Man. Seeding and reaping became an obsession with him; or, better, perhaps, a religious exercise.

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The sun rises higher; and the surface of the soil becomes moist as the frost of the night leaves the ground. The old man, in his swinging sailor-gait, leads the horses out of the low log-stable, one by one, the old mares first, and then the colt; and he hooks them together. And when he is finished with that, he drives them over to the seeder and hitches them up. A bag with the seed-grain stands behind the machine, leaning against the covering discs. He empties it into the seeder-box and reaches in with his hand that has only three fingers left, caressing it, lifting it up, and allowing it to run down in a smooth, golden stream, his lips muttering the while.

Then he mounts on the seat and takes the lines. The horse between the shafts—the colt—is the first to move.

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The two old mares are slow to start, reluctant; but at last all three are slowly walking away. He drives to the back of the yard where alongside the stable a pole-gate marks off the field. An old, rheumatic dog, a collie, almost black, but grey about the mouth, has limped over and fallen in line behind the seeder. The horses stop.

Slowly and stiffly the old man gets off his seat; and then he opens the gate, pulling out the poles one by one and laying them down, methodically, along the fence to the east of the gate. The colt paws the ground with one foot and snorts, stepping back and forth; but the two old mares stand still.

When the gate is open, the old man goes a few steps beyond and bends down to pick up a clod of the freshly harrowed soil and to crumble it between the thumb and the two remaining fingers of his hand. Then he looks wistfully out. To the east and the west of his farm huge, low-lying, bluish clouds of smoke curl along the ground, slowly rolling southward in the slight, cool morning breeze. They mark the spots where recent settlers are burning the bush, preliminary to the clearing of their first land. The air has the acrid smell of the smoke of green poplar-brush which the old man breathes in with a sort of deliberate relish.

Behind the log-stable, north of it, there still lies a snow-drift, caught in a poplar-thicket left for protection. The

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old man walks over there; he kicks against the snow which has consolidated into ice, glassy and hard, so that his foot glances off.

Then he turns back to the seeder. The dog behind has lain down and is reposing his head on his paws. But when he sees his master mounting the seat, he gets up and gives one single wag with the stump of his tail. The horses lean forward; and the seeder rolls on to the field and turns to the east, skirting the ground that is plowed. When it reaches the edge of the clearing, it stops once more; and the old man gets off again.

He bares and bows his head, as he stands between horses and seeder, and mutters a prayer. "God," he says in his own, Icelandic tongue, "I do as thou bidst me that those who are hungry be fed. I bring this offering to thy broad altar. Let it grow and prosper that it may become bread for those who will ask thee to give to their need. Amen."

And then for the third time, he gets back on his seat; and after pulling the lever that opens the grain-spouts, he turns north on his first long row.

Slowly, slowly the two old mares step out, hesitating at every move, while the colt between them frets and champs at his bit. Humped over the old man sits on his seat, holding the lines and clicking his tongue from time to time. And slowly, slowly the old, rheumatic dog

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plods behind, like the two old horses hanging his greying head.

And so they go up and down, up and down, over that thirty-acre field, while the sun climbs slowly over the vault of sparkling, cool spring air with its smell of smoke, and then sinks west again, thus marking a pulse-beat in the season.

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If you were to ask the old man why he does not rest, why he goes on seeding and reaping, he would look at you with uncomprehending, bleary eye; and perhaps he would stutter out a word or two of, "God. . . the children. . . and the land." And interpreted, those words would mean: So long as the land was not cleared, it was God's and supported that life which He had planted there. When man came and cleared it, he drove the wild life out to support man's life with what it could produce. To clear the land and leave it untilled, would be sin. And the children, even though they may be, as it is called, making their living, yet need bread; and so they may not take that bread from others who need it and for whom there is no one to grow it, he must still grow it for them that their life remain free of sin. This country is the granary of a world. To put it to that use for which it was meant is serving God; not to do so is defying God.

III. THE FIRST VIGNETTE: LOVE IN SPRING



TWO fields slope over the shoulders of two hills and meet in the east-west valley where a fence divides them; but more than the fence a narrow fringe of brush keeps them apart. This brush consists of alders and plums, of willow and haw; and in its centre as it swings from side to side, crossing and recrossing the fence, there runs over a shaly bed a little trickle of a creek. The haw is in bloom; its serrate leaves are still very small, and from a distance the shrub is outlined in its pointed dome by nothing but the numberless little platforms of white blossoms arranged in corymbs.

Neither of the two fields is really large; but each stretches over the top of its hill; and so they seem to form two separate worlds. The one to the north is newly plowed and half of it presents that ribbed and velvety appearance which the brown soil retains for a while when a drag-harrow has been drawn over it within the last few hours or so. The other field is only half plowed so far; and half of it still stands in stubble. The time is very early in the morning.

Then, nearly at the same moment, two teams top the opposite hills: the one coming from the south is a five-horse team drawing a two-bottom plow on which rides a boy;

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the one from the north consists of two horses that pull a harrow; and behind the harrow strides a girl.

From the moment that he topped the summit the boy has begun to urge his horses into a faster gait. His eye is fixed upon the girl who descends the flank of the opposite hill. Faster and faster he urges his horses to go although they step eagerly enough of themselves. He is tall, strongly but slimly built, clad in grey corduroy trousers, a blue cotton shirt open at the throat, and a red handkerchief loosely tied about his neck. His deeply tanned, dust-covered face is shaded by a wide-rimmed hat of cheap straw. The girl is similarly attired except for the loose, short skirt of blue cotton print.

When he reaches the bottom, he stops his horses, gets off his seat, jumps the little creek which here swings to his side of the fence, and runs through the bushes.

"Say, Ellen," he cries as he stops.

But the girl has already turned and is striding away, uphill, behind her drag. At his shout she merely glances back, smiles somewhat mischievously, and just nods.

With an awkward shrug of his shoulders and a deep frown between his eyes he turns and climbs once more on to the seat of his plow. Then he lifts the bottoms out of the ground and drives his horses right up to the creek where he lets them drink.

Half an hour later he tops the height again; but this

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time the girl is driving her drag uphill already. By the time when she will come down once more, he will have turned, and so he will not see her at all unless he looks back. She is gaining upon him, not only in the number of rounds, but also because a drag covers a much wider band of the soil than a two-bottomed plow. Every motion of his betrays hesitation and almost bewilderment. He glances up at the sun which so far stands only a little to the south of east; and then, at the narrow strip of land which he has plowed. Here, on the downhill stretch, the horses step out keenly enough, too keenly this time for him. So he pulls them back, for he needs delay to mature a plan.

When he reaches the bottom, where the bush-fringe screens him from every eye, even though it look out from the top of the hill, he stops his horses again. Once more he jumps the creek; and then he goes down to the point at his left where the next time she descends the girl will have to turn on the other side of the fence.

He has skirted this fence; but when he arrives at the spot, he steps back behind the screening bush, to the very edge of the shaly creek-bed, where the shallow water runs in ripples down to the west. The light of the morning sun washes over the whole of the landscape there, except over one single bower, which is shaded by the tender, young, glossy foliage of virgin plum trees. He bends

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down and with his hands dips the water up and applies it to his dusty face. Then he dries face and hands with the large cotton handkerchief which he extracts from his pocket. His movements are awkward; but there is purpose behind them.

And a few minutes later the girl tops her hill. From behind the plum trees he watches her coming, and his heart begins to pound. For a while she looks out on the hill in front, his hill. And then she begins to scan the fringe of bush. As she draws nearer, he can clearly see the puzzled expression on her broad, handsome face which glows with youth and exercise. She calls out to one of her horses as she strides along in her swinging gait which makes her broad hips quiver. "Step out there, Prince," she calls, for the horse on the off-side lags behind his mate. And suddenly a smile flits over her features, just as she has to pull her horses in for the turn. She is close to the line now, so close that Prince's nose almost touches the fencepost in front. It looks as if she hesitated a moment.

And then the lead-horse nickers; and Ellen laughs.

She pulls the horses to a dead stop.

"I knew you were there," she says. "But where are you? I don't see you. The horse does, but I don't. John!" The last word is almost a call.

And at that the boy comes forward, smiling sheepishly. They meet at the fence.

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The colour mantles her face; he looks rather paler than usual under his tan. Both are self-conscious and not quite at ease. For a moment her hands play nervously with her skirt; but the lead-horse touches her shoulder with his lips, and she sees the boy's eager and tense earnestness behind his smile; and these two things seem to restore her composure.

"I saw your team at the creek," she says, "through the willows; the leaves aren't thick enough yet." And she smiles almost archly up at him; but in that smile there is something else: some anticipation, some expectancy and perhaps uncertainty; she smiles up at him, for he is by an inch or so the taller. "So I thought," she goes on, stepping close to the fencepost and leaning her bare elbow on it, "you might want to speak to me." Something urged her to keep on talking, for she is afraid of a silence that she sees rising in his eye.

He looks at her, frowning; he hesitates, and at last he speaks. The words come with a catch in his voice. "I saw you," he says, "day before yesterday, in town. . ."

A furtive smile has once more touched her lips, as if in passing. But she, too, frowns. "With Dave?" she asks. "Well?"

"Ellen!" he says. The word comes blurring out: reproach, anger, despair, the agony of two whole days of it: all that is contained in the word.

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And Ellen blanches. "I know. . ." she says. Her voice trails off, softly, into silence, with an almost guilty touch in it; and her eyes waver to the ground.

"Ellen!" once more. There is a question, there is a great urgency in the word. The boy has taken his hat off and twists it into a funnel between his strong, awkward hands. Tiny beads of perspiration dot his strangely white forehead which strongly contrasts with the short, brown hair and the deep tan of his cheeks.

She blushes again and suddenly reaches out with her hand and touches his shoulder with the tips of her fingers. And at that touch she feels all the strength go out of her; and a sort of terror invades her very bones. Again her colour flees.

A moment later she is in his arms. "Ellen!" he calls for the third time as he crushes her against himself; and this time there is relief and triumph and exultation supreme in his voice.

"Don't, don't!" she gasps.

"I thought. . . ." he whispers.

"No, no," she replies, burying her head on his shoulder, across the fence. "You waited so long. . . ."

"You don't. . ." with a questioning inflection.

"You foolish boy," she whispers back, shamefacedly. "What is Dave to me! I wanted you to speak, and so. . . ."

And the rest is kisses.

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Higher and higher rises the sun. White clouds sail over the sky, and the thicket of plums is alive with whispered words.

The wondering horses have long since gone to graze on the ribbon of grass along the plowing. Their lines are dragging behind. But every now and then one cocks his ear and raises his head. They know not that two human destinies are being decided in the sun-dappled shade of the little thicket of plums.

IV. THE WOODS IN JUNE



WHAT a change has come, what a change! Two months ago these woods were bare, and chilly winds ran through their lanes; the ground was brown; and in the margins, near the road, lay dirty, sorry-looking remnants of snow. Now, at the end of June, separated from those days by a bare eight weeks only, the trees have shed their seeds, fruits have set on the shrubs, and what used to be more or less open balls of slender boles, have turned into a labyrinthine tangle of leafy chambers. Those who used to be neighbours to our eyes at least, if not to our feet, their houses easily seen half a mile or a mile or two miles away, live now in different worlds, full of mysteries, remote and inaccessible to our searching look; for curtains of foliage have been interposed in endless numbers.

The month of June is the month of miracles.

Marvellous as the first awakening of life in May did seem: when the grass turned green, when the plants of the field broke ground, when the first of the trees put forth their swelling buds and let the tender young leaves burst out: yet it showed the one fact only, though in endless repetition and variation. Curiously, it is true, we peered forth; a dozen times a day some restless impulse made us

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step out of the house and examine and finger, again and again, leaves, twigs, and buds. But we were self-possessed in our scrutiny and expectation. Every stage of what was going on was familiar and only confirmed what we had already anticipated in thought and mental vision.

Richer, no doubt, is the southern spring, but never does it touch us with that tenderness, that infinite, friendly familiarity with which our northern woods and meadows stir our heart. If our phenomena are fewer, we love each one the more ardently, just as the mother loves best among her children him who has to struggle and to fight and to whom life is not easy. Which love is as deep as the one that is shot with pity and full of forebodings or that which anticipates separation? Light be your life! Such, to be sure, was the blessing of the Greek poet. But, though we admire the easy and airy flight, we bestow our finest, our most intimate love where suffering, hardship, and early death overshadow. There love is sweetest because it is tinged with sadness and pain.

But sadness in June? No; June chases us out of ourselves; we are passing from Spring to Summer, from quiet dawn to the feverish day; we live through the glorious morning of the year. We are robbed of our self-centredness; we are swept off our feet and whirled along the fleeting lane of time; we are one with a universal ecstasy.

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We taste of the heady cup which brings inebriety all the deeper because it is so rarely vouchsafed.

Everything proceeds with a feverish haste. First the male willows only hold up their yellow phalli before a background over which a bloom of green seems to have run. Then the poplars hang out their red tassels pregnant with yellow dust; and two days later they have paled into soft, velvety grey. In another few days they strew the floor of the roads and the woods, for already their work is done. Next the ground in woodland and brush is spangled white with strawberry blossoms which hasten to bloom while they can snatch the light of the sun; for soon it will be replaced by deep, moist shade. And while they are blooming, poplars and willows are shedding their seeds already. Four inches deep lay the wool of the aspens one evening when I went out to gather it in. Dew was falling; and it looked like a soft, white blanket iced over with sparkling frost; and the roads, too, were white as under a fresh fall of snow. Meanwhile the leaves had been bourgeoning forth overhead; and hardly were flower and fruit safely out of the way when broadening blade and lengthening shoot were perfected: for still there is much to be done in the long, long days of June.

But so far we had been aware of two realms only: the planes of the floor and the upper halls of the forest in foliage. Now a third region obtrudes: the middle realm,

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halfway between the spangled carpet and the leafy crowns. One day we awake into a new world, so it seems: for there are in that realm of mystery, half shaded by the leaf-mosaic overhead, snow-white, rounded fairy-clouds of blossoms suspended, as it were, in mid air: snow-white with just a blush of pink in places. Those are the plums which also bloom before their leaves are out. Just at the height of our shoulders their clouds are suspended; and they exhale a delicate, infinitely sweet, and unobtrusive fragrance. But already they are showering down their petals; for swiftly proceeds this symphony in white.

A few days later the clouds have paled; the bloom of the plum is over; they have set their fruit; and they grow their leaves. But the white reappears. Kaleidoscopically the picture has changed. The component parts are still there, but their arrangement is new. Fine, delicate sprays, shooting up from only a little above the ground, have taken the place of the rounded, massive clouds. They, too, are white; but the white of these sprays is relieved against a background of pale, glaucous green. The plum has stepped back, as it were, in the dance of blossoms; and the pin-cherry has stepped forth.

Another two days, and the pin cherry pales; for its petals are falling fast. But already the edge of the bush is shaded and shot by new snow-white lines, as if drawn with a quickly working pencil, horizontally, at many levels;

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and every one of these lines is traced into a cushion of full, dark, deep green. That is the hawthorn in bloom.

And when it begins to shower its petals to the ground like snow, as if to mark a period in this cinematogram, the whole world around us, at the level of our eyes and above and below it, is suddenly dotted with points of white: the Saskatoon leaps forth with its foliage full-grown: its bloom overlaps with that of the haw which slightly precedes it, and also with those of our shrubs that are next in point of time. And yet, while it was there before, it is only now that it dominates the margins of our woods. It is the most abundant, too, of all our flowering shrubs; and blue skies, and white, sailing clouds nearly always complete its picture of virgin purity. As if to mark the period still more emphatically, its blossoms hold out a day or two longer.

But they also fall and fade at last; and at once their place is taken by the drooping, pendent clusters of the chokecherry. Again it seems the same white, and again in a different arrangement: broad lines drawn vertically into green backgrounds.

And when the chokecherry sheds its petals, it looks next day as if they had merely fallen on the cymes of the red osier dogwood somewhat below. These cymes are broad platforms, horizontal again like the lines of the haw-

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thorn blossoms; but they have greater depth in their mass, though the single blossoms are much smaller.

You would hardly expect this variety in the margins of the bush, were it not for the fact that the various shrubs are thus differentiated by their successive blooming.

Now is the time that the first new colour makes its appearance; the orange-red of the wild honeysuckle, the hirsute kind, with its flowers embedded in a cup, formed of two united foliage leaves.

And at last the white of the blossoms fades out in the rarer, flat-headed clusters of nannyberry and arrowwood, the latter with seven-rayed cymes. They are fully in leaf, of course, as is all else by this time, except the oak. But nevertheless, and in spite of their rarer occurrence, they attract by the greater size and showiness of their inflorescence.

There is a rest, a breathing space, now, in the quick succession of changing views: the time when white was the predominating colour that drew our eyes to the margins of the bush is past. True, raspberry canes begin to flower; true, the nodding trillium, the wild lily-of-the-valley, and the two varieties of the false Solomon's seal spangle once more the floor of the woods. But no longer is the green bush a mere background for the orgy of white in its ever new arrangements. If we want to see those, the shyer and more retiring flowers, we have to hunt for them. For

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the time being the young forest itself is once more the great and dominating fact; we go out to see what has happened there while we were absorbed in watching the courtship of blossoms in our shrubs.

I step out on my once familiar and much cherished glades, and I look around in wonder. Is there a change? Why, I do not recognise my most frequented haunts. How could I forget you, oh thickets and tanglewood copses, so long? How could I linger at the margin, following roads and open trails, instead of threading your more hidden beauties along those paths which no human foot treads but mine?

And while I look about and try to find what it is that obscures my best known landmarks even and makes this bush very nearly a stranger to me, it gradually reveals the secret as it will to him only who owns it because he appropriated it with his love rather than with his pocket-book. Again it smiles at me, as I begin to understand it, with those features which I know so well.

Yes, this is the same wood indeed that it was in winter and early spring; but its gesture is new. In winter it was a gothic hall with its windows flung wide as its most important parts. It covers a ridge; and its greatest charm was the look it afforded, out over the plains which rolled along like the sea. It was the vistas through the aisles of the stems which drew me; everything pointed out, away,

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into the far, far distance and to the horizons. Now it is closed, and the eye is thrown back to the grassy glade. That glade is a chamber and an interior now, with one single outlook, that to the sky. It is hedged about and shrouded and curtained; and no eye penetrates belonging to those who merely walk the earth. But sun and moon and far-sailing cloud look in. Chaste is the glade, pure and inviolate now, though already there are the signs of deeper mysteries to follow, for soon it will be the bridal chamber of the forest's favourite tribes. Here I can lie on my back in the grass and watch the dawn reach out with rose-fingered hands across the paling sky; here I can watch the shadows lengthen and night rise from her mossy bed. My eye can follow the clouds in the pathless deep; and only birds flitting to and fro will distract it from the contemplation of that which is. I am glad now that I deserted the woods for a week or two. If you meant to deepen my love by deflecting my view while you adorned yourselves, oh glade and bush, you have succeeded. What if I did not see the white of your blossoms, for here too you have dogwood and hawthorn, cherry and plum! Those I could find at other places as well. But what you have to give, oh my grassy glades, you give now; and I cannot find it elsewhere. I will come again, to be sure; I will come day after day and not forget what you are preparing for me.

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And the very next time I go I find the glade and the floor of the bush all studded with jewels. Yellow is now the prevailing colour of the ornaments: the pale, cool yellow of the lousewort—horribly named—and the warm, bright yellow of the lady's-slipper with its full, rounded pouches, sparsely speckled inside with purple. The painted cup adds another note with its long, two-coloured calyx, some ending in bright, brilliant yellow, and some in scarlet red. But above all there are the lady's-slippers, whole patches of them which are like the eyes of the glades. There is about these orchids something so proud, so boastful, so sexually ostentatious that their presence here, in the chastest seclusion of the woods, comes as a surprise to me whenever I see them. Another flower of the moist shade of the bush is also a surprise, but it on account of its rarity rather: the pink, nodding, racemed pyrola which is so hard to find.

It is strange how the prevailing colours follow each other: first it is white, then yellow, then pink, then blue and purple; and not only in the bush: the roadsides and grassy margins also chime in. With the white-flowering shrubs we have among the humbler blossoms stitchwort and sandwort; with the lady's-slippers the orange-yellow puccoon; and when the first sporadic pyrola has made its appearance in the deepest, moistest shade of the bush, the roadsides, too, and the clearings and open spaces will turn

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pink with thickets of roses, and all around nod the little pink bells of the dogbane in clusters; nor will the purple milkvetch and the blue-eyed grass that dot the meadows be long in being followed by the true vetches and the showy racemes of the everlasting peas which weave the underbrush of the woods into a tangled and impenetrable mass. And even in these latter the pale yellow species precede the purple ones.

There is, besides, a succession of families in this flora: the rose-family and the crowfoots lead all others; and the more complex organisms of the Umbelliferae, Leguminosae, and Compositae appear much later; these latter properly do not belong to spring but to summer, the dandelion forming an erratic anomaly superinduced by man.

This is also the time when the floor of the woods becomes veiled to the eye. It is as if a false bottom had been erected above the carpeted soil. Large, flat-leaved herbs spring up in great numbers, their leaves arranged like platforms, so dense that you cannot move a step in the bush without breaking them down: chief among them being the Canadian anemone which once more brings dots of white; snakeroot with its green, ball-like umbels; and above all wild sarsaparilla with whitish, ternate spheres of flowers hidden under the roof of the threefold divided leaves. So continuous is this platform of green that under it only the most ardent of the lovers of shade will thrive; and

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only here and there will a plant of a different type break through: the tall, slender, weak-stemmed plant, the climber or scrambler which is able to raise its head high up through the narrowest gap: meadow rue, bedstraw, and the peas and vetches. All these, by a striking sagacity, so it would sometimes seem, have fine, linear, or manifoldly divided leaves, each leaflet being able to adjust itself individually to its conditions of filtering light and airy currents. The leaves of the platform, too, are divided, but in larger, sheet-like units: instead of bending themselves into the path of a single, small beam of light, they catch whatever passes through from the dome of foliage above, letting none of it by without utilising it. A single leaflet of sarsaparilla is often six inches long and four inches wide; and the whole, ternately compound leaf which springs from the fragrant rootstock often measures two feet across. Somehow this huge horizontal leaf seems here to be the most important single fact, for it keeps the floor of the forest dark and moist by the shade it casts.

Yes, this is summer, a fervent, feverish, quick-lived, northern summer: for lo, the lady's-slippers are only just fading a little, and already the roses run riot over the glades; it seems only yesterday that the shrubs were still in their white glory of bloom—as indeed in the denser thickets I can still discover some dogwoods in flower—and already I find green plums three quarters of an inch long

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and green cherries an eighth of an inch in diameter. The hazelnut, too, has grown its crowded clusters of still soft green nuts; and the berries of the dogwood afford some of our birds their first, most welcome fare of fruits.

Why, this is June only; eight weeks ago we were just emerging from winter in daytime, with sharp, stinging frosts at night; eight weeks hence we shall be looking for the first nipping frosts in the early mornings. No, never a day let us miss of this!

And nothing as yet have I said of the living jewels that fly about. But I do not mean to set down a catalogue. A very few words will have to suffice with regard to the butterflies. Couper's Blue is the first one to make its appearance. Long ere the flowers of the shrubs are out these tiny specks of colour, which, being the first, seemed so brilliant, hovered over the glades of the still open bush. Then the mourning-cloaks awoke from their winter's rest; and as if to match the yellow of the woodland flowers, the great Tiger Swallowtail followed, to be displaced in its turn by the Monarch, gorgeous in orange and black. But what is the use of enumerating where it is hard even to know the most important ones: every cubic foot of the woods is teeming with life so intense that it makes you dizzy to think of exhausting your knowledge of even a fraction.

And so with birds: how often have I thought that

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surely I knew the birds of our bush to the very last; and yet, how often have I been electrified by a new sound or a new sight! Certainly nobody would have dreamed of finding a turkey-vulture in our northern forests. But one day a farmer drove over from quite a distance to fetch me: an eagle, so his story ran, had been caught in a wolf-trap which he had set: would I come and look at it so as to make sure it was an American eagle? But, when we reached the place, some fifteen miles distant, I found it to be the greatest among the scavengers of this northern continent. Nothing of the eagle about him: no eagle would have been trapped by putrid meat. We released him, of course, and fed him into the bargain.

Chief among our songsters—if I am to choose where choosing is hard—are perhaps the rose-breasted grosbeaks, with bobolink and vespers ranking next—though I may be partial to the vesper-sparrow because of its habit of favouring me with his choicest tunes after sunset when I have time to sit and to listen. Showiest are the orioles, tanagers, jays, and waxwings; shyest the doves, catbirds, and towhees; cheerfullest meadowlarks and wrens—if there is a sound on earth more apt to call to life latent smiles than the song of the meadowlark, I should like to know it; noisiest, of course, crows and grackles; tamest, kingbirds, Canada Jays, and chickadees; swiftest, the swallows and chim-

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ney-swifts; most nocturnal, owls, whippoorwills, and night-hawks.

The early morning is the best time to watch our birds: just before and just after sun-up. But I have noticed that on open glades and clearings no better time can be found than a cloudy forenoon after a soft, warm rain during the night. Birds know where insects hide; and insects sit tight in rainy weather. The ground, too, is soft, and the worms are close to the surface; and never have I seen a bird's beak fuller than I saw a wren's, one drizzly morning late in June: the load of the tiny bird looked as if it must weigh at least half as much as the carrier weighed himself.

But this short hint with regard to our birds would be woefully pointless in this connection if we did not remark on the extraordinary speed with which our summer visitors go after their most important work, that of breeding. One example only. The first vesper sparrow whom I observed this year—it had been a hard and much prolonged winter—appeared on the grassland in front of my place, between fence and road, on April 20. Four weeks later I found two of them building; and soon I located four nests over a distance of not more than three hundred feet; on May 28 the female in one of the nests had started her incubation; on June 12 the little ones hatched; and on June 21 they left their nest. The brood of a second nest was one week behind; and from the other two the eggs mysteriously

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disappeared. Everybody, I believe, can easily duplicate such examples of haste from his own experience if he will take note of dates. Already, so it seems from their behaviour, the vesper sparrows are getting ready for their second brood; as I know, not from guesswork, that the robins are.

June is the finest of all the months in the ascending year. It partakes of both summer and spring. No longer does the chill prevail which forces us often even in May to light a fire in the house of a morning; nor have we as yet those hot, sultry days which we so often find trying in July and August. Its relation to spring is most clearly pronounced in its orgy of blossoms; and nothing is quite so summerly as its rather rare but abundant rains. And yet, though they partake of the nature of summer showers, they lack that fiercely elemental, catastrophic air which distinguishes most of our summer storms.

The winds prevailing come from the west, north, and east; and these are dry. Often they will prevail for two or three weeks at a time. This spring, for instance, we began at last to notice a droop in the leaves, a certain weariness in the attitudes of the plants over noon; our gardens, too, were just beginning to suffer a little.

But when, a few days ago, one morning the wind veered around to the south, blowing sharply, fine, nearly invisible waves of airy vapour began at once to scud along

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to the north. Thicker and thicker they came, till the shadows cast by trees and buildings became less certain, less sharply defined, and less strongly contrasted with the open light. It looked as if all these fine sheets of vapour that hurried north ran up against some obstacle there, so that they were forced to double up; and this doubling up spread from the north all over the sky, but still with the sun shining when, early in the afternoon, I took my usual walk through the woods. I noticed then, for the first time this year, that there was a suggestion of that quality to the rays of the sun which we are all familiar with in July, previous to a storm: when the heat of the sun feels to our skin as if it had passed through some gigantic lens and the pencils of rays have been made convergent instead of parallel. Such heat we call sultry. I suspect that the cause of the sensation is in ourselves rather than in any peculiarity of the rays of the sun: the relative humidity of the air is high; and therefore the fact that our skin becomes moist does not cool it to any appreciable extent as it does in dry air when such moisture is quickly evaporated.

Shortly before four o'clock the density of these vapour-masses—layer having been pushed under layer—had become such that the sun faded out completely, not suddenly as it does in late-summer, but slowly, gradually, as it still becomes the mildness of spring. Then a short, light shower fell, with the wind still blowing sharply. It did not last

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more than a minute or so; and since we were anxiously waiting for rain, for a good, soaking rain which would refresh all creation, we looked up and about expectantly. But we knew that this steady blow of the warm south wind must cease before we could hope for fulfilment. Would it cease? Or would it finally blow all the moisture which it brought away again into the boundless wastes of the north? It did very nearly die out at last, with the sinking darkness; and lower and lower the vapour sheets lined the huge vault of grey above. The temperature did not fall with the falling night: it was as if a lid had been put all over the open spaces, keeping in the heat; and shortly before we went to rest a long, slow, mild, drizzling rain had begun to sift down. It was more like a very heavy, floating mist full of bubbles than like a shower; and we rejoiced, for we knew that such is the most fruitful ruin of early summer; slowly it penetrates the ground and prepares it for heavier drops which would largely run off if they fell without prelude on the dry, hard crust.

Next morning, when we awoke, we were none too well rested, for the night had been warm. The rain had stopped before morning; but the atmosphere, grey and moist, told a story of its own. I took a dry-and-wet-bulb thermometer out to test the humidity. The dry bulb showed a temperature of 68 degrees; the wet bulb, one of 64; only four degrees difference; and my tables told me

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that that meant a humidity of 81 percent. And while I was thus occupied, I drew my lungs full of air, deeply, voluptuously, for the atmosphere was like that of a brood-chamber or a hothouse; and it was healing like balsam; it soothed like syrup, smoothing throat and lungs. Not a breath stirred abroad. Ah, what a day to lie idle in, what a day to recline and just to enjoy being there!

In early spring a cloudy, overcast sky means a cold, chilly day, for the only giver of heat, the sun, is kept out. In summer, the same sky means an evenly warm day whose temperature seems higher than that of a warmer day which is clear. The heat is in the earth now; and the two cooling influences are cut off: radiation into the open spaces and—on account of the high humidity of the air—evaporation.

Then, about eight o'clock, an ever so slight movement set in from the south; a thin mist seemed to hang down like an airy curtain, right into the glades, and slowly to fade or to float to the north. A little later this movement began to quicken above, in the lowest layers of vapour which we could see. And a new impression obtruded. As far as the eye could penetrate, fold after fold had formed in the vapour-masses overhead, all hanging low, and every one trailing, while it moved north, a long, thin veil of mist which hung down to the very ground, retarded, so it seemed, by the contact with trees and shrubs and plants which reached up into it like the teeth of a comb; and every

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time such a mist veil passed over us a fine, drizzling rain fell, wetting, soaking us and the ground; the eaves just kept dripping, they never poured. I watched my thermometers, too; and every time in the mist—which was somewhat transparent when on us and only translucent when at a distance, with a white, diffused, half milky translucency—the difference between the dry and wet bulbs fell to three or even two degrees, the humidity rising, therefore, to 85 or 90 percent. There was fascination in watching these waves of mist that floated along, always a little behind the passing fold in the vapour-cloud above. The whole atmosphere seemed, for many miles, to be thus divided by the mist veils hung from the folds of cloud divided into long, slant-walled chambers running east and west. The soft, mild, hothouse air persisted.

Thus it remained all through the long morning and through the first half even of the afternoon. Then the wind from the south once more freshened up; it, too, came in waves, like a playful runner who stops now and then to look back and about. And soon the clouds rolled together in large, loose masses which seemed strangely airy and high as the blue sky looked through between them: very light and loose indeed for a summer-sky, lacking in outline and firmness.

At four or so the sun broke forth, with a vivid, nearly artificial brilliancy. But already the large, loose clouds

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had begun to mass and to pile up in the far northwest where the sun would be sinking into enormous banks with boldly flung, mountainous edges, their colour deepening to bluish grey; their margin only remained a pale white which was suggestive of only two things which I can think of: the naked skin of a rarely bared body or the white belly of a flat-bodied fish.

Behind this bank the sun sank at last away, gilding its edge for a moment, and then sending up, as if in protest, wide, spoke-like bands of blood red which looked like an outcry against the violation of his natural right to a regular sunset. The hothouse sensation which was still in the air caused us all to reject any covers except a sheet when we lay down to rest.

Our hope had become a certain expectation now; for, instead of rising after the drizzling rain of the day, the barometer still kept falling; and the mercury of the thermometer had remained at its level.

And certainly, with the first dawn of day, at a little past three, we were awakened by the roaring squalls that drove wave after wave of the vapour to the south-east whence they had come; but this time, in passing, they did not release a light, sprinkling drizzle; they poured in sheet after sheet of a splashing, heavy-dropped rain. The eaves of the house were spouting a jet armthick, through the rain-pipe, and they squirted it out as if under pressure.

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The shrubs in front of the open door looked huddled and hurried under the wind, as if they were running, bent over for air; and as I held my head out, just to refresh it, the wind and water nearly drowned my breath, while lightning and thunder seemed to leap wantonly about in their saturnalia of light and summer-noise.

V. A STORM IN JULY



THE first of July forms here, in our latitude, something like the equator of the year. So far the months have been ascending; now they descend.

Whatever in the summer's work requires more than a few weeks to be accomplished is well on its way to completion. Plants that mature their seeds before they attend to growth and storage have long since dispersed them. Plants that take their time about this chief business of the season, propagation, have set their fruit or are at least in bloom: among the latter all those that equip their seeds with any considerable amount of food for the seedling to start life on—or with an attractive pericarp so that they will be effectively distributed by bird or beast. Among cultivated plants—which do not choose the soil in which they grow—only Indian corn is still behind; and we do not expect it to mature its fruit. All birds, with the exception of the goldfinch, have laid their eggs, and some even those of their second brood: robins, for instance, vesper sparrows, and a good many others; and most that raise only one brood are feeding their young ones by now or have at least well started their incubation.

As for ourselves, we have been looking up, as it were,

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so far; spring is an intoxication; we have been spend-thrifts with our hours. Now we have topped the hill and look down; we are somewhat sobered; we become wistful and inclined to hoard what is left. But inexorably time flees along. Still, it is true, the warmer half of the year is left, for the seasons lag a little behind their landmarks. But for us, summer itself is over when frost can be expected any night; and that is within eight weeks after the bloom of the various members of the composite and labiate plant-families has begun: of the thistles and mints, the arnicas, daisies, and Agastaches.

There is this difference, too, in all nature as compared with only a few weeks ago: somehow an element of strife prevails; the manifestations of Summer assume an air of vehemence, of violent passion, and of antagonism. Summer in his youth was a constitutional monarch: he took over his realm from his predecessor Spring without fight or quarrel, as a mere matter of legitimate succession; but he means to hold it against all claimants; he will not admit the rights of a successor: he has become a tyrant now.

For one thing, the spread between the temperatures at noon and at midnight becomes excessive. This climate which we unthinkingly talk of as being of the temperate zone, is truly intemperate: it deals in extremes; it indulges in orgies; it goes on "sprees." At night the mercury often falls to forty and sometimes lower; occasionally, though

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only once in the course of years, it will fall below the freezing-point, much to the dismay of tender plants and insects. At noon it rises to eighty or ninety, and sometimes to a hundred and even higher. It is as if already there were inroads from hostile forces. But invariably, and as a matter of course, Summer conquers.

More characteristic, however, than anything else are the play activities in which the forces of Summer and his allies engage; these forces are no longer conciliatory; and sometimes they forget that they are supposed to be merely playing. Now and then their games come dangerously near to resembling serious and destructive warfare. In this respect they are very like those of Winter. And since these games and diversions are just now the most significant of all the entertainments on the program, let us sit in and look on at a number of innings.

* * * * *

For three days in succession the wind has been blowing from the south—a loud, boisterous, rollicking wind, at first very nearly refreshing: a wind that made the leaves flutter, the twigs sway, and the boles bend.

The first day it had died down towards evening; and we had had a quiet night; but the second morning it had sprung up again, bringing with it thin waves of vapour and a suggestion of smoke in the air which grew stronger as the day advanced; till at last towards noon the wind

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seemed to blow from a huge conflagration in the south. Down there the big marsh which stretches north of the open prairie was on fire as it often is. The speed of the wind was increasing, too, on this second day. The leaves strained at their stalks; the small aspens stood vibrating at an angle; the large black poplars huddled their tops together on the north side of their trunks; while the wind pulled and snatched at the edges of their green garments. A rag tied to a pole to mark off a neighbouring homestead claim cracked and crackled with the slight changes in the direction of the blast; and in the kitchen-garden behind the house the cucumber vines were lying helpless, belly up, with their foliage ragged and dusty and worn by the sand which even in this country of the northern bush began to blow.

The wind was overweening; it was unmannerly; it roused resentment. When, for some reason or other, I had to step down into the ditch along the road, it threw the sand and gravel into my face by the handful. Besides, it was hot, it was oppressive and sultry. There was that in the air which made me lose my temper when the wind threw my hat down: it was such a mean and contemptible trick to make me exert myself in recovering it on a day like this; and there was also that which made me sit down on an inverted candy pail in the lee and the shade of the house, back against wall, hat pushed down my neck, hand-

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kerchief in limp, sweaty hands, ready to wipe the clammy brow and to resign myself with a sigh. What could one do but resign oneself?

I have said nothing about the sun. I did not care about him. It was not he who ruled the world or the landscape. His Titan-son Wind was having his fling and tyrannising and lording it over the lower realms. Father Sun stood high up—when you did look for him; somewhat coppery and red in the face, but distant and critical, as though he were saying, “I wonder what all this tomfoolery will lead to in the end. No doubt I shall have to go bail for the boy at last.” But if one did not simply forget about him, one might even have dared to look straight at him without blinking. His Majesty was eclipsed and jostled into the background.

The second night the wind persisted; there was not even the usual let-up at sundown. A smell of smoke filled the little house in the bush and gave its inmates a headache. The whistling and rustling noise kept us from sleeping; even the little child tossed about in her bed, hard as it otherwise was to disturb her. We felt nervous, expectant. Dust drifted in through the crack of the slightly raised window. A mosquito sang in the bedroom; expertly it had squeezed in through a mesh of the screen; and every now and then, when it approached my ear, its strident song seemed to assume the tone-volume of a trum-

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pet blast, so that I started up from my troubled half-sleep and struck viciously but ineffectively at my ear which felt gritty with dust and which now began to smart with a burning irritation.

The last I remembered before I finally fell asleep for a few short hours was a lull in the general din. It seemed five minutes later when the alarm-clock rang; and at the same moment I heard the wind again. I had to rise and go about my chores, for I did a little farming during the holidays, between teaching; but I felt fagged out, morose, and evil-humoured from the start.

Somehow I got into my clothes and, holding on to shirt and hat, went out. Had I considered the question the day before, I should have thought it impossible for a further climax in discomfort to out-top the one then present. Yet, on this third morning of the windstorm—there it is. Possibly it consists in nothing more than the cumulative effect of the two preceding days; but to me it seems nearly unreal, like an exaggeration stretched to the breaking point.

Nature seems to lie prostrate. In passing, on my way to the stable, along the kitchen-garden, I notice the large canes of sweet corn, blowing north like tattered streamers, weary and resigned. I look at the young boles of white poplar—resistance is useless now; they have given in; there is nothing else to do. Not the slightest attempt is

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made any longer to raise their thin and mobile leaf-stalks and to lift their blades into the path of the light. Wearily I fix my smarting eyes upon the sun. He looks like the moon: wan, pale, resigned like the rest of nature.

Has he given up entirely, too—he, the lord of the world—given in to his rebel son who henceforth is to rule all things, a tyrant, resistless wielder of brutal might usurped? Ceaseless monotony holding sway over the universe?

I linger over the horses while I brush them; their coats are damp, ready to break into dripping beads. I stand for a while in the stable-door, looking out at the sky where impalpable waves of vapour are still scudding north. I think of the chickens and find them on the lee-side of the stable, lying in the dust, mouths agape, hardly thinking it worth their while to get up in expectation of a feeding.

And suddenly it strikes me that there is not a bird, not a fly, not a gnat on the wing!

I do not put the harness on the horses as I had meant to do. Instead, I turn them loose into the lot and go back to the house to get my breakfast. There the little girl babbles away, cheerfully, and shames her elders into controlling their lack of good-humour.

Shortly before the noon-hour there is a sudden strange sensation borne in upon me—something profoundly disquieting—and I look through the window, across the

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grade, towards the giant spruce tree that has escaped the early fellers in the bush—it has found a friendly homestead master who left it there, a corner-pillar of his yard, to dominate the landscape for six miles around.

“The wind has stopped,” I say to my wife. “I suppose I had better go and draw some hay.”

But I am not revived although the little girl comes running along, in anticipation of a ride. When I reach the stable, I just feed the horses and let it go at that.

It is immensely hot; the sun begins to shine more actively while the vapours lift: a bright, aggressive, nearly cruel blue appears in the sky. There is a sting to the rays of the sun. The back of my hand is dotted with little drops, and, as I lift it, the rays of the sun feel like the points of little glowing wires just grazing tormentingly along the skin.

I return to the house. My wife does not remark upon the fact that I have not gone; things are self-evident and self-explanatory; no need for futile words. I sink back into my easy-chair.

Then—a sudden chill through the open window—a swirl of dust across the grade in front of the yard: it came from the north! A rattling din! I get up and go out on the porch to look about, the little girl preceding me. A squall of wind has blown the lid off the rainwater tank at the corner of the house. But already a deadly calm has returned.

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A wall of black cloud has arisen in the northwest—black, with a strangely undefinable, livid tinge to it. The sky overhead is more aggressively, more cruelly blue than ever before.

“I think I had better do my chores,” I say to myself; and as I look at my watch, it is two o’clock.

“I suppose we are going to have a storm,” I say into the open window of the little house.

“I suppose so,” the answer comes back as I stride over to the woodpile and load up my arms; the little girl, too, carries a stick. “Look, daddy,” she says, “how much I can take!”

After a while I put the lid back on the water tank and place a stout cordwood stick on top to weigh it down.

The wall of cloud has risen now. It covers the sky in the northwest to an angular height of thirty degrees. It has taken on a ragged edge, with rounded bulwarks thrown out whose margin is ghostly white. All tints of grey shade into each other, down to that dark, bluish grey which in clouds we call black.

And suddenly, while I stand watching on the porch, nerved up, refreshed already in anticipation, the wind breaks loose again, this time from the northwest, however—like a wild beast of the cat-tribe that springs up, confronts, and snarls at you. Instantly the grade is swept

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bare of dust; fragments of bark, old leaves, rags, bits of paper start a unanimous march to the south-west, as if at a word of command. Out of the corner of my eye I notice something moving on the siding of the porch. I turn for a moment, for the moving speck seems to irritate me. A fly is holding on, there, with six strained feet, wings a-flutter, trying to crawl, against the wind, behind the shelter of the jutting corner-plate. Doors slam; whatever can rattle, rattles. I brace myself and stand and look; I am as if I could not move.

The wind plays strange antics. It reminds me now of a dog that pulls at something and jumps around it, snarling the while and baring his teeth in the determination to get whatever he pulls at, a rag maybe. The woodpile is southeast of a building, exactly in its lee. A cordwood stick topples over from its western edge—not to the south or east, in the direction of the wind, but to the west, against that direction. A counter-swirl is set up there: suction pulls towards the wall and upward, whirling; a bit of paper which first has been blown into the lee of both pile and building gets caught, rises, rushes over the woodpile, towards the wall, and upward; and as it reaches the height of the eaves, it starts back at an angle, downward and southward, enveloped at last in the main current of the leaping, careering wind.

This wind runs in waves; the wires of the fence vibrate

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and hum; the house shakes; the trees sway; but the giant spruce tree merely nods.

While I am taking all this in, the wall of clouds has risen in front to the height of sixty degrees. My wife has stepped out of the screen door behind; but I do not turn. We both look forward, eyes wide, and watch. The little girl calls from the window, unconscious of whatever may be preparing.

Right in front a light, greyish mass detaches itself from the darker background of cloud. There is an eddying movement in it, downward, outward—a movement incredibly swift for the bulk involved, incredibly sure and determined. The light grey mass assumes the form of a funnel with ragged edges, mouth downward; or that of an inverted, huge, ghostly flower with trumpet-shaped cup, the short stalk springing from the clouds above. A circular wind, independent of the mad, roaring rush which envelops the rest of the world seems to sweep around it; and where it touches the ragged edges of the funnel, these edges seem to dissolve, to melt away, to disappear.

Low rumblings are heard high up in that wall of clouds, away in the west, as if some master were coming, scolding from afar—coming as a deputy of Father Sun to settle all this foolishness of South Wind and North Wind in rebellion. But already we know, mere rumbling and scolding will not do it. Sterner things are on their way.

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And everything around us knows: for everything around us is in flight.

Look at the trees: how they are running, their shoulders humped!

But the sun still shines. He superintends the preparations.

And while we look, that grey, inverted funnel or flower seems, of a sudden, to spread out, to expand into a second wall or veil in front of the dark main wall of clouds. Both are rising fast.

Then the sun blows out like a candle. His deputy is in charge and well able to see to it that things are done properly and duly restored; and so He himself retires.

My eye fastens on to the bluff of balm poplars, a quarter of a mile away, right in front of me, across the big meadow. A strange thing happens there; the bluff becomes so dim; it gets blurred; and suddenly it is blotted out entirely, swallowed by that light grey veil which arose out of the funnel and which now shuts us off from the world farther west.

At the same time a few heavy drops come slantways down and rap at my body like knuckles, striking right through my clothes, straight to the skin. The pitter-patter of the rain begins to drown out the roar and swish of the wind; but more imperiously now does the rumbling overhead dominate the enveloping gloom. It is no longer

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a rumbling; it is the growling of a beast caught in a cage and trying to break out.

The rain comes down in streaks, ever increasing. The wind, which is no longer audible above the noise of falling water, blows it into waves or sheets. Like streamers of grey in grey they follow each other, hurrying, scurrying, pitter-patter-fashion, louder and louder, till the impact on leaves and roofs and ground becomes like the roar of a swollen river falling in a chasm between rocks. Wave after wave, ten inches to three feet apart, hurtles by; and in each wave, drops and darts of water hurry down.

It blots out all creation around. None of the buildings is visible any longer. Not even the woodpile, scarce fifty feet away, shows anything beyond a mere outline. I myself stand in a small, murky dome of visibility—beyond it is chaos.

And then I look down at the gravelled ground in front of the house, at the floor of the porch. In streaky waves the rain reverberates there, the base lines of the upward jumping streaks slightly behind the base lines of the incident rain-waves, retarded and at an angle to them, making a crisscross pattern on ground and floor. And while I look, a transformation seems to take place. Somewhere, some time, I have seen a tiny marmoset monkey in a rage, beside himself with fury, dancing about, upright, swinging his arms and gnashing his teeth, and

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chattering in senseless raving. And what I see in front of myself on the ground, on the floor of the porch, transforms itself into myriads of such little monkeys, close to each other, crowding each other, and jumping and dancing and fuming with inexplicable rage—that is the rebound of the rain.

And then there comes the first great burst of light—a bluish flash; and, half sheltered, half soaked on the open but roofed-over porch, I raise my head and count. I get as far as five. Then a short, bellowing bark, and a growl so fierce that it sets my hair a-tingle. And somehow, incomprehensibly, the rain redoubles, as if spurred and lashed on to a supreme effort of “do-or-die”—and while I still marvel at it, in spite of the noise, of the roar that surrounds me, a feeling comes over me as if everything were suddenly hushed. My mind gropes about for a moment; and then the impression crystallises.

That master above who was coming to set the world to order again steps right over me and standing astride above me, seems to stop for an impalpable second before he empties out the bag of his wrath. And then he does it.

A burst, a cataract, a convulsion, a spasm of light breaks loose. I feel the grip of a hand on my arm. I wince, catch a gasping breath, and close my eyes. But it was too late. That searching light looked into the basement, under the staircase, into the closet, into the oven,

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and into every nook and crack and cranny on earth—and maybe into my innermost thought and heart.

And instantaneously, before I even have had time to realise what has happened, a thunderclap follows, short, rattling: a blasphemy and an abomination of sound—making the house jump, tearing into my sense of hearing like a knife into a raw wound, leaving me knock-kneed and trembling, an atom, a nothing in a world of higher significances.

On strides the master. I hear him bark again, once or twice—then he growls; and at last he rumbles, while in the west the sun breaks through and around us plays at rainbows on every leaf.

The little girl comes out, barefooted, to splash in the pools.

I had not noticed that the rain subsided and the wind died down. Like a desert of barren snow is my mind, a white blank, stunned into unconsciousness of all things about me. But like a scarlet patch of blood shed on a real snowfield there lies on the white, impassive background of my vision the memory of that frightful clap of wrath.

When at last, in the evening, I go to the stable, I draw gratefully in through my nostrils the strong and fertile smell of Mother Earth.

VI. THE SECOND VIGNETTE: LOVE IN SUMMER



IN a small, exceedingly neat and trim farm-yard in the bush, a little removed from the road that winds along to the south, there stands a tiny whitewashed loghouse, the walls being plastered with mud. The house contains a diminutive kitchen and a second room which is almost filled by two wide steel beds, a cradle, and a table with house-plants.

In the kitchen, a woman goes about her work, preparing dinner on a small cast-iron stove. A table, in front of the low little window piercing the west wall, is covered with white oilcloth and set with simple, heavy dishes. Often, while she attends to the meal that is cooking, the woman steps to the screen door in the south wall and peers across the yard and out along the chasm of the bushroad that skirts it, winding. Often also she looks into the cool, shuttered, and shaded room behind the kitchen the air in which is slightly stale and musty; there a tiny red and wrinkled bit of humanity sleeps in the cradle towards a fuller life. And occasionally she bends down to the low window in the west wall, peering out into the kitchen garden in which two small children are playing and romping and crowing in the hot noon-day sun. Every time she

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does one of these three things she interrupts the soft humming of a song. Apart from the noise of the children a great silence lies over the landscape. Not even chickens are about at this time of day; and the dog has stretched himself on the ground in front of the door.

The woman is tall and broadly built: she is built for work. Her face is still handsome; but it is tanned with the summer sun. Her step is elastic, but just the least bit trailing. Her feet are bare. Her light-blue eyes, however, are clear and quick.

It is very hot outside: the heat of midsummer noon; but it is hotter in that tiny kitchen. The woman's throat and forehead are beady with perspiration.

Thus twenty minutes or half an hour elapse. Then the shaggy collie-dog who was lying on his side, in front of the screendoor, his four legs stretched out, sits up on his haunches and tilts his head to one side. His sudden motion attracts the woman's eye; and she quickly steps to the stove, removes a lid, and puts a kettle on the open fire. This is a routine which repeats day after day. Once more she peers into the neighbouring room, nods to herself, and then goes out on the yard, into the glaring sun. The dog has already shot away on the road to the south.

A close sod of short grass covers all the yard; it feels cool and soft to the woman's feet. Quickly and energetically she walks across it to the wide, swinging gate that

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leads to the road. And as she reaches it, a heavily laden hayrack, drawn by two big bays, turns the last bend in the trail and makes for the gate. A reclining figure on top of the load comes to a sitting posture; and John nods down on Ellen, his wife. The dog is circling the load, with his tail a-wagging; now, that he sees his mistress, he jumps and barks, running back and forth between hayrack and yard.

A great softness has come over Ellen's features; all the dragging has gone out of her step as she eagerly opens the gate. Again the horses lean forward, and the load sways on to the yard. One of the big bays nickers; and the dog jumps up to his nose as for a caress. Meanwhile the two children come running from the garden behind the house: one a boy, the other a girl. The boy is only about two years old; and in his eagerness he stumbles and falls, setting up a howl. But the girl, of some three or four years, trips merrily along and shouts, "Hello, daddy!" "Hello!" he answers from aloft and bends over to look at the two, while Ellen lifts the crying boy to his feet, who now stands pouting with half of his one hand in his mouth.

"Well, sonny," shouts John; "got hurt?"

And in mute protest against the meanness of the laws of gravity the child merely nods, so that both parents laugh.

And so the load passes on to the back of the yard where, next to the stable, the haystack looms.

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There John waits till Ellen comes; for she has closed the gate again.

"Shall we pitch off?" John asks, bending forward so as to look over the edge of the load.

"Dinner's ready," says Ellen and steps in behind the horses to unhook the traces.

"All right," says John, slipping down, "we'll leave it, then."

And a minute later or so he guides the horses to the stable while Ellen returns to the house. John feeds the horses, and then he lingers a moment, patting their rumps and feeling down their legs: these horses are his pride. In the meantime, the children have been standing in the door, waiting; and when he has finished, he turns about, sweeps the youngster up into his arm, and takes the little girl by her hand. Thus the procession goes to the house. The little boy is crowing with delight as he tries to catch hold of his father's dust-covered nose which always is jerked away just as he thinks he has got it.

By the side of the screen-door Ellen has placed an enamelled washbasin on a bench; and the boy looks curiously on while his father splashes and rinses the dust from his face and washes his hands. Then John enters the kitchen. Ellen looks up and answers a questioning glance of her husband with a smile and one single word, "Asleep."

Dinner proceeds in silence. It consists of potatoes



"Spreading the hay
which John pitches up to her."

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with salt, boiled eggs and a little fried bacon, with tea for a beverage.

Then Ellen and John enter the adjoining room, on tip-toe. John looks curiously at his youngest child, while Ellen raises her, waking her gently, to give her suck. John sits and rests, looking on contentedly. But when the child has had her fill, John takes her; and Ellen does her dishes.

An hour after dinner Ellen stands on top of the haystack, receiving and spreading the hay which John pitches up to her. Ellen's strong and capable body stands her in good stead now, although John pitches so as to minimise her lift. The sweat is streaming from both their faces in big, dripping beads. There is no time for jesting or laughing; this is serious work that has to be attended to; at best there is strength and energy left for cheerful faces.

During the afternoon John brings a second load home; and it is pitched off before supper. Then follow the chores. John must go into the bush and hunt for the cows; he takes them to water and drives them home. Ellen milks, and John turns the separator. The cream is put away in the little smoke-house, the milk divided between cottage and pig-pen. The sun goes down in glory behind the trees, and evening coolness settles over the western world. The children, tired from a hot day's romping, are put to bed; the baby is fed, and the parents are free.

Both Ellen and John are also tired; but the summer

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night lures, and they are young. They step out on the yard and sit down on the bench by the door. A mild breath of a breeze, laden at once with coolness and warmth—the two go in streaks—wafts the scent, sweet and hot, of the freshly cured hay through the air. Ellen rises and stretches herself, a little lazily and voluptuously. She looks out into the friendly darkness as if she were searching for some great good. For a moment she lingers; for a moment she calls in her thoughts for her mate; and then she walks slowly away, towards the back of the yard, towards stable and haystack. She knows John is following her, and a deep contentment mingles with her longing for him; she cannot see him nor hear him, and yet she knows. She goes on, to the southside of the haystack, walking a little faster now; and there she stops, waiting. A moment later she feels John's arm about her waist, and a tremour runs through her body. Again she stretches herself; and in doing so, she turns her head back ever so slightly. John's face is close to hers, and her hot breath bathes his cheeks. Her arm reaches back for him, and thus their lips meet.

VII.—THE GLOOM OF SUMMER



SHOWERS here on the plains are sudden showers. July is a variable month, full of whims and caprices, just as unreliable as April is in Europe, though in a different way. April there sets out to show itself whimsical and capricious; it flirts with its very weaknesses as its greatest charms; it is the month of cool spring weather with sudden bursts of fervent heat: the month of swift-sailing, snow-white clouds which may or may not bring rain, you can never tell. July here, on these plains of Western Canada sets out to show itself warm, genial, radiant like the sun himself; one is often tempted to assign to it that character which Thoreau assigns to the June of New England when he says, "The year is in its manhood now." You are deceived by its appearance of friendly, summerly benevolence. But under the often serene exterior fierce passions rage which find vent in long skulking fits or in wild outbursts of seemingly uncalled-for violence. Sometimes we have sudden cold spells which may last for a week or two and which hardly ever bring rain, in spite of their threatening skies. The whole month reminds of certain women of thirty who are slaves to uncontrollable and erratic desires, flashing up in ecstasy, quick to break forth in love, quick to take offence, cynical

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and relentless in their revenge, and yet hardly accountable for their actions.

It is true that, worked out over long periods, averages show the month of June to bring down slightly more precipitated moisture than does July; but in June we have those periods of comparatively long continued rains which fall softly, mildly; and when heavy showers come, they usually follow preparatory lesser rainfalls. In July all showers are swift, violent while they last, heralded by nothing but a sultry heat; and sometimes long periods exhaust themselves in vain threats, accomplishing nothing, tormenting us by anticipations which again and again are doomed to disappoint us. There is no accounting for the whims of July. Other peculiarities will obtrude in the course of the chapter.

That kind of a storm which I have tried to describe in a preceding essay is practically sure to come, once and maybe twice in the course of our summer. When it does come, its approach is as unmistakable as that of all major events in the dance of our seasons. Not one of all the many summers which I have spent in this northern country has ever disappointed me of it; and so it is typical enough; but it is also more or less unique in the year: it is the grand spectacular event.

In these short notes I shall try to give an idea of how I see the month of July as a whole.

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THE LANDSCAPE.

A few years ago I was living—with my family—in the fringe of the subarctic forest, some ten miles or so west of the Lake. During the dogdays I undertook to teach school in a little district still farther north, near the lake-shore, right in the heart of the forest, where the cause of education was threatened and people were having troubles galore. I proposed to spend my holidays there, putting the school back on a working basis, thus doing what I considered a useful piece of work and incidentally improving my ailing finances by one hundred and twenty dollars for the two months. I took a bicycle along, so that every Friday I might go home to wife and child. You may rely on it that henceforth I became still more of a watcher of cloud and sky than I had been before; for on the new, clayey roads of the north a bicycle is soon put out of business. During the five school days of the week I boarded with a farmer of the district who, having taken up his homestead at the end of a long, laborious, and thrifty life, enjoyed rather more of the creature comforts than did most settlers in that country of pioneerdom. Two miles north of the little school in the woods the organised territory ceased altogether.

We had moved into Plymouth Cottage during the last days of June; the first of July happened to be a Sunday; my school was to open on Tuesday morning.

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On Monday I rode over from Plymouth to Hnafur—that will serve as the name of the Icelandic district. It was the first long-distance bicycle ride I had had for twenty-five years. And what a country it took me through! I have since been back there repeatedly, and it has undergone a good many changes; but I still consider it worth a summer's trip to see it again.

The road from Plymouth where I left wife and child in the wilderness leads straight east for seven miles. Then it angles northwest for ten miles more; and finally it turns east again for a last seven miles to the lake. The two straight east-west roads are new, clayey or marly grades built by the province, still rough and full of large stones which are more than apt to throw you off your bicycle every now and then. At the northern end of my trip they are newest and, therefore, worst in this respect. The angling north-west stretch which joins the two east-west grades is, I believe, the oldest real road in the entire west of America; it is centuries old and was once used by the trappers of the Hudson's Bay Company, when there were still beavers and other fur-bearers to trap in these parts. It is called the Big Ridge, and it looks in many places like an old, shelving beach crest. But no doubt it is the medial or lateral moraine of a glacier of the ice age washed smooth and superficially stratified by the waves of the Lake which once covered and later bounded it; for I have

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observed at other places that the level of the Lake is steadily receding.

Along the first east-west road I met four farms, the buildings erected of logs and plastered with mud. None of these houses could contain more than one large or two small rooms; I should say, they measured about twenty by fifteen feet. And yet, from the crowds of children on the yards—they all either took flight on my approach, or they stood dumbly staring, hardly taking notice of my cheerful call—I was astonished at the number of inhabitants they must shelter. The poorer pioneers are in a money sense, the more prolific they are of issue. These four homesteads make two groups of two houses each, separated by about three miles of still aboriginal wilderness in which the new, raw road looks like a strange anomaly, like a piece of engineering which foreshadows a future of less idyllic simplicity. At none of these farms was there as yet much breaking done; it looked as if the bush encroached on the very yards—though in reality the encroaching is done by the farms; or rather, it looked that way at three of them; the fourth one—or better, the first one for it was nearest to Plymouth Cottage—was built right into the edge of the freshly drained swamp. Since just beyond it the ground sloped up and the grade rose high above the level of the land, I dismounted and walked a piece; and then I stopped and looked back. A highly up-

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to-date school and the trim little cottage, both painted white, looked like a paradox on my horizon. They, too, stand on a high, gravelly ridge resembling an ancient beach crest or moraine. In front of it, to the east, the ground sloped down to an immense, swampy trough which was still only partially drained and so wet that nothing but sedges, rushes, flags, cat-tails, and huge-leaved swamp-docks thrived there. Everywhere the water stood in stagnant pools which emitted a marshy smell and in which here and there, as I passed them, huge gas-bubbles rose and burst, giving a smacking sound, as if the swamp, lying there like an imperturbable dragon, were smacking its lips. Immense clouds of large-bodied mosquitoes—the *Anopheles* kind—were hovering around, and I was glad that I was wearing veil, gloves, and gaiters.

Where I stood, in the gap of the road that led afar, the woods to both sides looked pleasant enough with their dense thickets of aspen boles, overtowered by the yellowish foliage masses of huge balsams. But these woods are impenetrable; their lower aisles are a tangle of high-bush cranberry, Saskatoon, dogwood, and hawthorn whose feet in turn are bound by mazes of raspberry canes. And yet, how many, or how few years rather, and the wilderness will have been fought back! To me there is something melancholy in that thought.

As I went on, meadows and sloughs opened up every

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now and then, here to the north, there to the south, and sometimes sweeping across the grade from horizon to horizon. Every one of these sloughs was bordered by a rim of low, scraggy shrubs—willow, dogwood, alder, symphoricarpus—among which here and there the dark-green, glossy foliage of a scrub oak showed up, growing on the twisted, stunted, gnarly stems of the tree which looked like a very mockery of the noble column which the same species—*quercus macrocarpa*—builds farther south. Then there followed, skirting the miry sloughs somewhat more closely, a ribbon of good, pasturable grass—with a fair sprinkling of red-top in it—and lastly, in the centre, fought back by the encroaching drainage, the unmistakable flora of the alkaline swamp with its cutting, gritty, siliceous blades.

The wind came from the east, a lively, sprightly breeze; the sky was deep-blue, in striking contrast with the white, floating clouds that dotted it. These clouds seemed to form and to dissolve as you looked on; their edges were ill-defined; there were huge bays and rents in them; and here and there you would look right through the white expanses, as if into deep, bottomless lakes of blue. How rare is a midsummer sky without clouds: that pure-blue sky which we have so often in winter, spring, and fall! The weather was cheerful enough to all appearances; but behind or beyond it you sensed a deep gloom, a tension

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of all the forces of Nature, an equilibrium which was pre-eminently unstable, which reminded you of insanity: it was the gloom of the northern summer, next of kin to the summer of tropical jungles, and so very different from the northern spring.

In places, as I passed over it, the road would give: it trembled and shook as if it were merely floated on the treacherous swamp. I noticed that in such places it was underlaid by brush and logs, piled at right angles to it as its foundation. The soil spread on top was a black, peaty mass, singularly soft, but, being almost entirely composed of vegetable fibre, quite free of dust. Over these spots, too, there floated clouds of mosquitoes.

Then, as I approached the Big Ridge, there was a change in the landscape: the forest assumed a more spacious and a loftier aspect. The gravelly soil and the higher elevation afforded better drainage; the willow thickets thinned out and disappeared. Here the light filtered down to the very bottom of the woods, though the shade was still dark and dense. You could imagine gnomes and goblins to live here and to make merry, with roots and stumps for seats. Farther west, in the muskeg bush, there would be the realm of fabulous snakes and dragons. Such birds, too, as you rarely find in the swamp—it being the home of grackle, snipe and plover—were frequent here: oriole, grosbeak, and goldfinch.



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The road sloped sharply up where it joined the Ridge, through a veritable chasm of towering timber.

And out I swung on that gloriously level highway of old. Smooth as asphalt it was. Right at the corner of the two roads there was a sleepy little town; and a little south of it there stood a station, the end of steel, with two or three slow and unreliable trains a week. But my eyes sought the forest and not the haunts frequented by Indians, half-breeds, and foreign settlers.

There was something wide and roomy about this road: nothing of the crowded "road-allowance" of the more settled districts to the south. The dry, gravelly soil of its level top did not allow much vegetation to spring up: a sparse, thin crust of short grass covered all but the very centre which was entirely bare, with sharp, gritty, but perfectly firm and smooth sand for its material. Only ice and water could have built such an ideal highway many miles long. On the slopes to both sides there were large, towering bluffs, with the American aspen prevailing. And yet, what gave these woods their distinctive character, what made them look like aristocrats as compared with the humbler, more congested swampy lowlands, was the fact that every few hundred yards the crowns of the rustling poplars were loftily out-topped by the tall spires of enormous spruce and larch trees. They looked so immensely old and pedigreed, they supported such a retinue of mosses

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and lichens, they were so awe-inspiringly tall that you felt silenced and called to order. And they stood aloof: they were lonesome in their gloomy grandeur and wise with the unspeakable wisdom of the ages.

Suddenly it struck me that those white, floating cloud-masses, which were still sailing in the sky, all crowded southward; and as soon as I came to an open break in the line of bluffs to the west of the road, I became aware that the wind had turned. It was blowing sharply from the north-west now, and when, a little later, the Ridge made an ever so slight turn, I found myself once more steadily working against the wind. The forest did not crowd me here, as it had done on the artificial, man-made roads; and therefore it did not protect me either. There was elbow-room for the wind as well as for me.

How dark the foliage looked in the bluffs! The white clouds seemed, by their very contrast, to throw a gloom all over the landscape.

Every now and then I tried for a glimpse of the Lake to the east; but whenever a vista opened, I saw nothing but the rolling sea of tree tops stretching away over the ancient lake-bottom slope to the very horizon.

When I had gone a few miles to the north-west, without meeting any one, here and there catching sight of an abandoned or intended homestead only, and even that at long intervals, I had a sudden surprise. On both sides the

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clear space of the Ridge widened out into a huge, circular, man-made clearing. And in its very centre, close to the road, stood a saw-mill. For a moment I did not trust my eyes; but my ears quickly convinced me; for just then the big saw, screaming viciously, bit into the sappy wood. I rode up to the outfit, exchanged a greeting with the two men at work, and looked on for a minute or so. Poplar lumber is none of the best; it is neither strong nor durable nor smooth nor straight; but it is cheap, and, so I thought, it probably admits of a better way of building than logs do; and at any rate it will serve for veneering a log-house against the washing rain. All the machinery of this pioneer outfit stood in the open, under the weather; and there was nothing but a little fifteen-by-fifteen shack for the men. I looked in; it was built of the raw poplar planks, tar-papered outside, and showing the bare joists in the single room.

Only he who has ever gone on a long-distance trip, wheeling, and has had the wind against him will understand that I felt honestly tired by this time. Nor was I very sure of the road and the distance. But I knew I was somewhere near the end of my progress on the Ridge. I had counted on making my goal for dinner. But it was nearly noon now; and I had not covered more than about half the ground. So I went on again, pumping the pedals

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against the wind, north-west into solitude. Not a person did I meet for more than an hour.

Then I suddenly saw a building ahead. It, too, from its aspect, was built of the poplar lumber sawed here in the wilderness; and it, too, was covered with tar-paper, shack-like; only, it looked too large for a mere squatter's shack. How strangely organised or civilised the water-built road looked as compared with this man-built house, which, when I reached it, turned out to be a store kept by an Austrian. In the background, against the bush, there stood a stable built of logs.

I enquired about getting a cup of tea but was referred to a homestead a little farther north where travellers were made welcome. There I lingered over the hottest hour of the culminating sun. Traffic, so I heard, existed here only in winter, when the Indians from up north hauled their loads of fish to the end of steel.

The wind was still blowing sharply from the north-west; and I hoped now that it would keep up; for soon I should have to turn east again and should then have its help half from my back. It was cooling, too, for the air was fairly dry.

It was still early in the afternoon when I set out again. How endless a road seems when you travel it for the very first time, before you know any of its landmarks. Nothing seems farther away than a distant goal which is not herald-

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ed by familiar signs of approach. I was much longer on my way that day, of course, than I should have been had the wind been favourable; and yet, the time which I was actually wheeling probably did not amount to more than five hours. But to me it seemed like a whole-day trip of ceaseless and monotonous toil.

About a quarter of a mile north-west of the homestead where I had stopped for dinner the Ridge came to an abrupt end. The road went sharply down into a gap which looked like the opening made by an ancient river; it might either have sawed its way through the already accumulated moraine or beach crest; or it might have prevented its being piled up at all. But the flat soil of this bottom was now smoothly covered with knee-high, waving grass.

Then I swung sharply up again, on to the road leading first straight north and then, turning at right angles, east; this was at that time the northernmost grade in the provincial drainage-system; beyond it there was the land of mere time-worn trails, inhabited by scarcely any but Indian squatters. The road was still excessively bad, covered by loose sand and gravel, so that in places it was quite impossible to stay on the wheel; it needed rain, rain, rain to beat it into something like solidity.

The bush here, at the beginning of the road, was a wild tangle of underbrush; and for three miles or so it remained

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the same, with not a sign of any settlement. Then, to my surprise, I came to a large clearing with waving grainfields and a farmyard far back from the road on which the most striking building was the dwelling, covered as it was with tin which had rusted into a nearly scarlet red. To my still greater surprise I saw, close to the grade, a herd of pure-bred Holstein cattle. I noticed that the big udders of the cows were badly scratched and lacerated by the thorny bush of haw. The mosquitoes were exceedingly troublesome.

Where the road turned east, for its last four-mile run to the Lake, the character of the forest changed again. The soil here was once more that of the swampy lowland; but the trees were large and very lofty. The floor of this forest, it is true, seemed dense and tangled; but—I suppose on account of the loftiness of the trees—this underbrush-tangle did not obtrude. The height of the grade which, distracting my eye from below, concentrated my undivided attention on the stems had also something to do with it, I believe. High, snow-white trunks, here seemingly forming solid walls, there opening up into narrow and very high Gothic aisles, determined the impression. Dark, unknown, and gloomy, the shade of night seemed to crouch in these woods, ready to leap out on the clearings and the road, as soon as the sun should sink, threatening with incomprehensible potentialities. Somehow these woods reminded

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me of Darwin's description of the forests of Tierra del Fuego. I could not get rid of the feeling that they were not a monument of the intensity of life so much as rather one of everlasting death itself. Not growth seemed to predominate, but what we call decay, though that is merely one of the forms of growth. These woods had been like that when the Indians roamed them as the lords of creation. Human life had beaten against them in little, insignificant, lapping waves. It had ebbed and flowed, come and gone.

The moisture under the trees seemed excessive. The huge number of trunks which, broken, snapped off by the fierce windstorms of summer and winter, were leaning slantways across the still healthy stems of their neighbours, and of those that were already lying prostrate and decaying into a powdery wood-mould was by no means calculated to dispel the impression of brooding gloom. And yet a strange fascination seemed to impel me to peer into the mysteries of the shade. Grey, formless shapes seemed to flit to and fro. The dim, indistinct visibility that lurked there seemed personified: it was insanity perched on a rotting branch.

White-stemmed aspens prevailed among the trees; but there were also large colonies of glossy-leaved balm poplars. I saw no conifers here, but now and then a rare, scrubby oak, and, still more rarely, a large specimen of

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the white birch, distinguishable from the aspen even at a distance by the roseate tinge in the white of the bark. In the underbrush, far and away the most abundant shrubs were Saskatoons and willows—among the latter *salix cordata* and *salix candida* prevailing. The impenetrable, cushion-like masses in the lowest realms of the margin were mostly composed of raspberry canes. Among herbaceous flowering plants none were more common or more striking than the large, glowing bells of the wild, orange lily which everywhere dotted the edges and meadow-glades.

At last I came to the end of my journey. I had no idea, and nothing betrayed, that I was close to a settlement. But suddenly a little vista opened to the south; and there, embedded in these woods which were wellnigh on the point of making my skin creep, lay the buildings of a homestead, neat and trim like those taken from a toy-box.

After supper I sat for a while outside with my host, a huge, broadly-built Scotsman of sixty. But when the sun neared the horizon, it turned so chilly that we both shivered and got up. I noticed that my clothes were thoroughly damp; and on looking more closely at the weave of my trousers I found that an infinitude of little bubbles of dew had condensed there, one at the end of every woolly fibre. The woods were awake with the call of the whip-poor-will.

I could only repeat: What a country this was! How

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different from the woods only one hundred miles to the south! Those woods were mild, soft, lovely; they were the adequate setting for spring; these here were gloomy, elemental, terrible in their gloom, with the terror that attaches to all origins; but also beautiful—with the beauty of Nature in the raw—no less so than the desert, or the sea in its anger, or barren mountain ranges of rock and snow.

SCHOOL AND COTTAGE.

The school was just one mile north of my boarding-place; there was no road but only a trail. Nor was there a road leading to it from any direction, no matter where the scholars came from; and most of them came through two, three, four miles of bush. Before I even reached the place, I had found one reason why those people had never been able to hold a teacher. They had brushed that trail year after year; but the summer's growth from stumps and underbrush was so rank that by the beginning of July it was nearly obliterated. You could not stray, for the canyon of the clearing was unmistakably marked by the walls of the forest on either side; but the underbrush through which you had to wend your way kept beating against you; and it was so heavily laden with dew that soon my shoes and my trousers and my drawers even were completely soaked with water up to my hips. There was a tiny office in the school; and I saw that I should have

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to bring a change of clothes along to get into when I arrived in the morning.

During the day, while I tried to get acquainted with my scholars—some of them Indian, some half breeds, some Icelandic, some English, and some Scotch, but all eager, anxious to learn, and born gentlefolk of the wilderness, even though they knew not what purpose shoes might serve in summer time—I kept, unconsciously, an eye on the flag. How it turned and twisted in the changing winds! And the winds were sharp up there, in the open, though never a breath stirred around the schoolhouse.

The two-acre clearing—at least it had been a clearing once upon a time—was a paradise of wild fruit for the children: brambles and strawberries prevailing in indescribable profusion.

I came across a scrub oak, not more than four or five feet high, with peculiarly long, new shoots which sprang from the stump. I went for a footrule and measured them; they were more than three feet long, and that was the growth of no more than eight weeks, for the oak is the last of our trees to put out its buds. I found leaves on this oak measuring sixteen inches in length, and seven and a half inches across at the widest point. These low-growing leaves seemed to expand like sheets in the shade; and when a casual whiff of wind blew them over, their silvery undersides looked from a distance like large, cymed

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flowerheads embedded in the dark, glossy green. I cannot express how overwhelmed I was with the rankness and luxuriance of this vegetation, attained in an incredibly short time, with feverish haste, and in the face of nights during which the mercury mostly dipped down to near the freezing point and sometimes below it. The last heavy snow-storm in these parts had that year taken place on the fifth of May.

The mosquitoes were so dense in places that a cloud of them cast a distinct shadow on the ground. They were large and exceedingly active, stinging as soon as they settled down on the skin, without giving warning as the less opaque kind—*Culex*—does farther south, by that squeamish, tentative groping about with which we are all familiar. Of the many countries which I have seen only Lapland and Northern Siberia rival and even surpass this country in the abundance of these troublesome pests. But I have not seen the arctic regions of Canada. They seem to have a great predilection for the neighbourhood of your ankles, just above the edge of your shoes; and also for your wrists and the back of your neck. Young calves are sometimes killed by their stings; and cattle and horses are driven into a frenzy. I had also been cautioned against the big horse-fly, the “bulldog” as people here call it; but it did not seem to be nearly as aggressive.

The schoolroom hummed with the mosquitoes, but the

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children took them quite philosophically, smiling at my frantic efforts to kill as many of them as I could.

At night, my host opened up and told me something of the mode of his life. He had only three acres broken which he planted to oats or barley; but that did not include his garden. Besides, he had six head of cattle, four horses—two for work and two for driving—a few pigs, and a flock of chickens. That kept him and his family in ample comfort. He cut wild hay, of course; and in winter he garnered a harvest of ice from the Lake, enough to provide him with water all through the summer; for the well on his yard yielded nothing but an alkaline fluid whose taste, undiluted, was forbidding alike to man and beast. What little cash he needed, he got by selling butter and eggs in summer, and in winter by selling a few catches of whitefish from the Lake. Unlike those who had set their heart on a money-crop of wheat—and there were of them even in this aboriginal wilderness—he did not have a laborious life. So-called civilization, with its feverish chase after treasure, seemed infinitely far away. If this was primitive, it seemed refreshingly dignified to me. The man was neither dependent nor helpless: he never worried; Nature and God were his only two concerns.

There were four English settlers in this district, including my host, and two or three Icelanders; the rest were Indians and half-breeds; but the latter, so I heard,

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were getting ready to move out before the incoming tide of Anglo-Saxons. They will for ever recede to the margin of pioneer cultivation.

When I went to school on the second day, the dew was again excessively heavy. I had had a thermometer out over night to register the lowest temperature; and it had fallen to 34 degrees. That temperature would have been dangerous for tender vines like those of the cucumber family; and its contrast to the highest temperature of the preceding day—93 degrees, as measured in the clearing of the schoolyard—served largely to explain the heaviness of the dew. On my way I could see wreaths of steam rising from the foliage everywhere in the bush; and it was ten o'clock before the last of the droplets on herbs and shrubs had disappeared. All day there was hardly any wind at all.

In the evening my host and I sat out till late, protected from the mosquitoes by a smudge. It did not seem to cool down with the setting of the sun. For once a warm glow remained resting over the woods which mostly looked chill, forbidding, and inhospitable at night. The whip-poor-wills were tumultuously active all around, ecstatic in the fervency of their calls.

On Friday I went to Plymouth Cottage. I was anxious to get there, for this first week-end would have been terrible

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for wife and child had they had to spend it alone in that utter desolation of the northern swamp and bush-land.

During the night before the trip the lowest temperature at Hnafur had been 65 degrees, and in the morning there had been no dew on bush or grass; but instead, the mosquitoes had been denser and more aggressive than ever.

About ten o'clock a south-east wind had sprung up, bringing high white clouds which sailed loftily north-west. The wind had sent a refreshing stir even into the chamber of the clearing where the school stood; and it seemed as if this breeze made me all the more impatient for four o'clock to come.

It came, and I walked briskly back to my boarding-place. There was no possibility of wheeling on that trail; the bicycle would have been a hindrance only. While I was swinging along through the bush, disregarding of the fact that my shirt was beginning to hang limp with my perspiration,—for even in a gale there would have been perfect shelter in the canyon of that road—I became aware that a hush had fallen; the east wind had very suddenly died out.

At half past four I straddled my wheel. It was distinctly sultry now, and the perspiration brought no relief to the feeling of oppression. The sun was glaringly bright, and the woods looked all the blacker. There was provocation in the glare of the sun—a challenge which

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seemed nearly pitiless mockery. It was so hot that the landscape seemed to lie in a swoon.

But, there being no adverse wind, and my impatience to get home lending me wings, as it were, I flew along with great speed, wheeling regardless of stones and loose gravel and crashing over them. Something was brewing; and if that something broke before I reached home, the road across the swamp might easily become impassable. Forward then!

I made the store at the Ridge-end in a little over an hour. A low-flung, long, dark cloud-bank lay at the horizon in the north-west—as if it were watching there, waiting its opportunity, peering just over the edge of the world. The sun mocked derisively back.

I stepped into the store to ask for a drink of water. The man there called my attention to a thermometer which registered 119 degrees. I do not know, of course, how reliable it may have been; but the atmosphere felt as if it were speaking truth. I do know that the water, supposedly fresh-drawn, was stale and tepid. It made my perspiration run all the more freely.

I did not watch things very closely while I flew along the smooth expanse of the Ridge, going in a south-easterly direction, with my back turned to the threatening cloud-bank. I was bent on speed only, longing to see my little girl; and the road lent itself to speed.

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By the time I reached the next turn, in the little town at the end of steel, the sweat was running down my back in heavy, tickling drops; and it kept dripping from the point of my chin; the knees of my light-grey trousers were dark with wetness.

Thus I swung west, on to the last road across the swamp with its ridges of forest. I could easily have made this last heat in less than an hour, with no wind against me, had it not been for the roughness of the road which forced me to dismount and to walk nearly half of the time, pushing my wheel.

Whenever the bush receded from the road—which was a correction-line, by the way—I scanned the sky. The low-flung cloud-bank had risen considerably: it stood now like a black, sheer cliff covering a third of the sky; and it still rose rapidly, in uncanny silence, while the sun burned down on me and the woods, from the west, as if it would consume us. It was a picture of mute but confident defiance on both sides.

The heat seemed to have become very nearly audible: the inside of my ear-passages even was beady with perspiration, and the blood seemed to roar through my veins.

When I reached the first two farms, four miles from Plymouth Cottage, there were the first wincing movements—I find no other word—in the cliff of the cloud: it looked like an interchange of signals; muffled lightnings flashed

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across; but, much as I listened, I heard no thunder. The upward and onward sweep of that cloud was grim, silent, determined; but it seemed utterly unconcerned. A piece of work had to be done; it was going to be done; let him who was in the way look out. And indeed, the mere sight of the cloud was enough to spur any traveller on, quite apart from what it implied. And again I flew along at my fastest.

I came to a place where a recent fire had wrought havoc in the woods: the charred trunks looming black, the green underbrush still with the appearance of life in its foliage, though sered here and there and shrivelled up, but with its stems burnt through at the ground, as if gnawed off at the root by the creeping flames. With that black cloud-cliff for a background all this looked weirdly like a battlefield with the scattered remnants of the defeated army.

Higher and higher the black wall rose, parts of it every now and then wincing with uncannily silent discharges. And hotter and hotter, so it seemed, the sun burned down: a mutual defiance which threatened to crush the mere human atom which should foolhardily dare to step into the gap between the forces in the approaching battle.

And then I emerged at the edge of the swamp, on the hill from where I saw at last school and cottage opposite myself. The black menace stood now right overhead, and

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also east of myself, like an arched vault; it looked as if it were trying a flanking movement against the sun in the west. The light over the buildings in front was strangely ruddy; but to the north, over the open swamp, there was already an edge of the shadow cast by the cloud: there the light looked steely grey.

The road was better here, and I flew along. School and cottage seemed to grow up before my eyes. And then, when I topped the very last rise in the ground, just before I reached the culvert bridging the great master ditch which here runs south, connecting the drainage-system of the northern woods with its southern outlet into the lake, I saw my little girl run out from the cottage, on to the road, waving her little arms, and shouting, "Daddo! Daddo!"

That moment the sun was blotted out; and three seconds later I vaulted off the wheel, swept my little girl into one arm and, pushing the wheel with my free hand, ran for the porch of the house where my wife was standing to welcome and to applaud. Two or three drops, it is true, had reached me, but otherwise I was just in time; for the very moment that my wife laid hold of the handle of my wheel, the cloudburst rattled down behind. The wind hit the bluff at the back of the house like a cracking whip; the empty rain-tank at the corner rolled off like a paper-basket; and the downpour seemed to drown the world.



"The little girl rode high
as we get out."

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I was exultant, for I had beaten the rain in our race!

Half an hour later, the sun shone again, brilliantly but ironically; and everywhere, on the level ground, pools of water were standing while the still new, unconsolidated road was a floating mire of water-soaked silt.

The ridge on which the cottage stood stretched south for a matter of four miles or so, keeping the master ditch to the east and crowding it farther and farther into the swamp. It consisted of gravelly boulder clay—a soil which should have been left entirely to the native growth of trees. As it was, it had been burnt over once or twice, in a vain attempt to make the land available for pasture. The consequence was that it had been invaded by strawberries—to such an extent as to make it a veritable fruit garden ready to our door. It was there that we spent the Saturday a-berrying. The little girl rode high on my shoulders as we set out; my wife carried pails and a blanket to spread on the ground when one or all of us should get tired. The high ground had shed and absorbed the rain; the sun shone bright; and the day fulfilled its promise of an ideal outing. When we came home, late in the afternoon, we were staggering along under our respective loads, for every pail was filled with the fragrant berries. Even the little girl had picked a pint or so which, however, she spilt, much to her heartbreaking sorrow.

Sunday dawned bright and brilliant, with the air of

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perfectly settled weather; but from the early morning a brisk south-east wind kept blowing. Since the air was pleasant and the wind kept even the mosquitoes down, this Sunday established the routine for the summer. That routine depended of course largely on my wife's acceptance of my weekly absence with nothing but the week-end for coming home. It was thus that the following chapter came to be written.

THE DROUGHT.

It was on my way back to Hnafur, after this first week-end at home, that the significance of what was going on at the two ends of my trip first dawned upon me, though even then I did not yet become fully conscious of it.

I started out at four o'clock in the afternoon. Again I had the wind against me up to the Ridge. After that I had it half from the back. Meanwhile a huge, new storm-centre was forming in the far south-west, and large, flat-bottomed cloud sheets were pushing over the sky to the north-east, in a direction at right angles to the wind prevailing at our level. Although I did not pay any special attention to the phenomena, being bent on reaching Hnafur before dark, I registered the general impression of wide, successive folds in the cloud sheet. At the Ridge-end I partook of supper, offered this time by the wife of the storekeeper when I stopped.

The atmosphere by that time was so weird that I

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felt strangely detached from all earthly things. My purpose of speed was forgotten. I sat for an hour or so on the steps of the store and scanned the clouds.

As I watched, I gradually came to distinguish four separate layers in them. They covered the whole of the sky, except in the north-west where there was something like a wide, low gate for the sun to look through in setting. It was marked off at its upper edge by a perfectly straight beam of cloud which, being quite horizontal, glowed in an angry kind of burning purple, not more than ten angular degrees above the edge of the world. It was repeated above in an infinitude of exactly similar cloud lines resembling beams, and shading off in all tints of purple into red. The sky below it, in the gap, was a pale, livid green, like the green of the sea.

Against the background of this highest cloud layer the others lifted themselves off very distinctly; next to it, and therefore next in height above the earth, but reaching down in the west no lower than to within about thirty degrees from the horizon, there followed a pale, pearl-grey layer, it, too, being bounded in straight, long-flung lines; then, still lower, an irregular, patchy, wind-swept layer in dark mouse-grey: this one with torn, ragged edges from which large, floating masses detached themselves, pushing south; one of these masses showed the outline of a gigantic bird with uplifted feet, as if he were

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flying rigidly along without moving his wings: a heron it might have been from the form; it was through the rents and bays in this layer that the two upper ones were seen; and the lowest layer consisted of huge, loose, cottony masses, black, lowering, which were hanging low and floating along to the north, every here and there cutting off the view to the higher layers. In the gate of the open sky, far to the south-west, one such cloud-mass seemed to touch the very horizon, as if it were resting on the broad foundations of the earth; and since it projected beyond the higher layers, reaching out into the path of the light from the sinking sun, it became suffused with a weird, lurid, purple incandescence, quite different—on account of the admixture of yellow—from the purple of the highest layer which I have described as being arranged in the formation of horizontal beams.

All the light that was shed over the things of the earth seemed to come through the gate in the north-west, from an invisible and incomprehensible source: it was so uncanny, ghost-like, unearthly: the world seemed like a hollow cave lit up by torches from different worlds.

In the low slopes and marshes to the west, the trees and shrubs, the ditches and ridges, and the rare buildings all looked black: but it was a diversified black; there were many shades of black, as you see them in black-flowered silk.

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Meanwhile the scenery of the clouds kept shifting about in absolute silence. There was no wind any longer perceptible anywhere on earth. And suddenly there resulted an arrangement which somehow recalled to me an evening on Mount Etna, facing the sea. The pale-green aerial deep looked just as the ocean had looked there; for your horizon ever seems to be at the height of your eye; and therefore the ocean over which you look out from a great elevation seems itself to rise the farther it recedes; it stands up like a wall to the very height of the mountain on which you are. The illusion was so strong for a moment that I felt urged to look about for evidences of my own great height; and from the third layer, counted from above, the mouse-grey layer, long tongues of cloud were pushing out into the void, resembling most of all closely wooded peninsulas and rocky islands on which I seemed to look down.

The cloud masses were moving about on their intricate paths, unconcernedly, and as if with some hidden purpose of their own which they did not care to divulge: the lowest layer of detached black masses silently and swiftly moving north; and the next one steadily, determinedly, but also silently shifting south. Who was I that I should want to know the why and the wherefore? I could have imagined Him who moved them about to shrug His shoulders at the insignificance and arrogance of my enquiry.

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"I guess you'll have to hurry," said a voice behind me; "it looks like a storm." The storekeeper's wife had stepped up from the door.

I jumped to my feet. "No," I said; "this is not a rain sky; it is a wind sky. The storm is fifty miles south." And I pointed to where, straight south, the lowest clouds winked at us with distant lightning.—It was almost chilly.

But the spell was broken, and so I left. As soon as I swung on to the road leading east, the mosquitoes began to feast on me. The air stood still as in a grave; and like silent monuments the white-trunked trees loomed in the murky dusk.

"Well," said my host when I reached his house, "I hope we shall get that rain. We need it."

"Not to-night," I replied. "But soon, I hope."

I found that on Friday, when we had had the heavy rain at Plymouth, not a drop had fallen at Hnafur.

The weather, as it so frequently does in July, had got "into a rut", to borrow a phrase from Burroughs. The atmospheric depression had begun to swing back and forth, back and forth, along established paths. To those who had was to be given again; and those who had suffered were to suffer again, much as the promise of relief was being held out. I began to suspect that it would take a month or longer before things would subside again

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into that comparative equilibrium which we call settled weather.

The next two days were as like each other as two twin brothers. It struck me again how rarely we had—in July—those perfectly clear, cloudless days which are so frequent with us in the other seasons; and a perfect calm is equally rare; and so is, therefore, an evenly overcast, hazy sky. An incessant and vehement commotion is stirring the atmosphere up.

At this time the sun heats the surface of the earth in comparatively restricted areas so violently that strong, upward draft-flues of heated and therefore expanded air through less strongly heated and therefore heavier layers are constantly being created; for all meteorological evidence seems to point to the conclusion that air when heated rather quickly does not at once ascend but, by virtue of a certain viscosity in the upper masses, remains for a while in an unstable equilibrium with the colder, overlying strata. That is the reason for the violence of the disturbances set up in summer as compared with spring and autumn. When at last the tension between the lower and upper reaches becomes strong enough to force an issue, the break occurs more or less suddenly and at a still more restricted point: a flue arises; and from all over the heated area the lightened air rushes towards this flue and through it upward, pressed down upon by the tremendous weight of the surrounding

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and overlying masses of cooler air. Sharp and unruly currents arise, bringing whatever they may have to bring: a sudden cooling, rain, hail, electrical discharges, or even violent whirls. That is also the reason why rains and winds in July are so prevailingly local and independent of the wider conditions which determine our climate. I have known three separate centres of so-called depression—"so-called," for in reality they are merely the flue-centres where the rising of the air apparently reduces its pressure—to exist within sixty miles of each other; and within this distance, therefore, short, violent windstorms blew from all directions towards three different points. In travelling swiftly you can sometimes pass from one such area of atmospheric disturbance into another which was created simultaneously or nearly so.

The reasons for the great inequality and even seeming irregularity in the heating of the earth's surface are of course exceedingly various and often bewildering in their complexity, once you begin to study them; chief among them probably being the slope of the land.

I will try to make this clear by one example.

The land west of the Big Ridge forms, generally speaking and neglecting minor irregularities, a tremendous trough sixty to eighty miles in width and a hundred or a hundred and fifty miles long in a line from north to south. Let us suppose the sun to be in its noon at a point east of the

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Ridge. Then, if all the land were perfectly level, the area east of the Ridge would be most strongly heated since the rays of the sun would strike it at the greatest angle possible for the season and latitude. But the land west of the Ridge slopes away to the marshy lowlands. It is clear, then, that this slope diminishes the angle at which the rays strike it and therefore increases the area to be heated by a given pencil of rays or, in other words, by a given quantity of heat. On the other side of the big trough, however, the land rises again towards one of those long, low lines of elevations which in successive longitudes cross the prairies. There, then, the surface of the land cuts the rays of the sun at a greater angle now than it would do were it perfectly level, yes, at a greater angle even than the land which has the sun in its noon. It receives more heat for a given area, is itself more strongly heated, and in turn heats the air above it to a higher degree. If this heating is strong enough—as it is in summer every now and then—it will result in the sudden creation of a flue. As a further consequence, the air from all around this local centre of “depression” begins to travel towards this flue; or, in other words, local winds arise which blow from all directions more or less nearly to the same point—never quite, by that curious property of air currents which—though it is certainly not satisfactorily explained as yet—we presume, with an air of Science, to call the Law of Cyclones.

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Now let us consider the same neighbourhood a few hours later. The sun stands in its noon west of the line of hills at the western edge of the big trough. On account of that very slope which before gave it its advantage over the eastern edge in the matter of the amount of heat which every one of its area-units received from the sun, it receives less now because the slope diminishes the angle at which its surface cuts the direction of the rays of the sun; and, correlatively, the amount of heat received by the eastern edge is now increased because its slope cuts the rays of the sun at a so much the greater angle. In other words, the position of the two margins of the trough with regard to the sun has become reversed within a few hours; and if everything was favourable to the creation of air-flues, so has the direction of the wind over any intermediate point.

As a matter of fact, it was this reversal of the wind, ushered in by a lull at noon, which first called my attention to the phenomenon. I observed it almost daily at a time when I lived farther west in that same trough than I did during that summer of which I am speaking here.

In order not to create the impression that I overestimate the influence of the slope of the land, I will just mention that another factor is often of equal and—taking the earth as a whole, including the oceans—of even greater importance: that factor consists in the different “capacity for

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heat" exhibited by different kinds of surfaces. It is well known that it will take a greater amount of heat to warm up a swamp than dry soil, for the "specific heat" of water is very high. It is this very fact which at present still seems to accentuate the two margins of the trough referred to as the places where "flues" arise. And it also explains why in winter the same neighbourhood is less subject to purely local, and more subject to country-wide influences; for in winter the covering of the surface is uniform.

All these, however, are not only local but also merely superficial disturbances coincident upon the great heating power of the summer sun. For the upper reaches of the atmosphere, away from the direct influence of the heated surface of the earth, remain comparatively little affected. Through pure air the rays of the sun pass as through glass, without heating it to any extent; which explains, for instance, why the movements of the clouds in summer are so often quite independent of the movement of the wind in contact with the earth. In fact, I believe that most of our atmospheric disturbances are much less high reaching than is commonly supposed.

On both of the succeeding days the morning started with a *nearly* clear sky. Still, even as early as five o'clock, when I first went down, there were some wind-blown threads and wisps of cloud. By eight o'clock a few large, white masses had formed and were floating to the south,

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with a brisk breeze blowing in the same direction. By ten they had become much more numerous, forming a sky dappled in white and deep-blue. These were two of those days which are cheerful and refreshing on the open plains, hot and dusty in the cities, and rather close in the woods where the breezes do not penetrate. By noon the white of the clouds began to predominate in the sky; and some of the clouds were beginning to be lined with grey. Then they began to roll together, into huge bulks, with bright, blue stretches in between. Now and then one would float in front of the sun; and its shadow would flit over woods and lake. The rate at which the edge of the shadow moved would give a pretty accurate measure of the speed of the clouds. I should say it amounted to eight or ten miles an hour. About two o'clock I observed on both days one of those short, casual showers which are so common and so disappointing in our semi-arid climate. Both times the sun was shining brightly the while; and neither of the showers would have been sufficient to lay the dust on dusty roads—which here, of course, we did not have as yet. The clouds were not low enough; nor did they have the necessary depth to them. At any given moment the two showers covered an exceedingly small area, not more than a few hundred yards across; and a fast horse, running in the direction in which the cloud travelled, could have kept just ahead or

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behind or in it at will; and, with an extra effort, it might even have passed through it.

The second day I watched another such shower which did not pass over us but travelled along over the Lake, at some distance. That gave me a very clear view of the outside appearance of the phenomenon. Since the cloud passed on continuously, propelled by a steady blowing wind, every drop, as soon as it was released—though, with regard to the earth, it changed its position not only as far as gravity acted on it, that is, perpendicularly, but also, by its own acquired momentum, in the same sense as the cloud—yet, falling as it did into less swiftly moving layers of air—themselves retarded by their contact with the earth—lagged somewhat behind the cloud which it seemed to follow. A single drop, of course, could not be watched thus by the eye; but the multitude of them formed a distinct opaque streak which looked as a trailing tail would look behind a swiftly running animal; or better still, it reminded me of a dangling and trailing “guide-rope” hung from a balloon which was pushed along by the wind. The cloud was the balloon; the aggregate of the falling drops, an immense, loose guide-rope hanging from it to the earth.—I like to watch such things and to search in my store of mental pictures for analogous phenomena.

Late in the afternoon the clouds went through the opposite range of metamorphoses; gradually they decreased

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in number; and late in the evening nothing was left of them but a few white threads and wisps.

The night was very cool; the dew was heavy.

Since no south wind had preceded these days, I think that the clouds were being formed from the moisture raised into the atmosphere by local evaporation. The heated air close to the surface of the earth is greedy for any moisture it can pick up; dew, the capillary water of the soil, the steam released by the foliage of these dense woods which must be enormous in quantity. As the air rises wherever the sun heats the earth to such a degree as to create a "flue," it is cooled by expansion, consequent upon the reduction of pressure, and by contact with colder layers, the moisture condenses into clouds; the afternoon proceeds, and a reverse process sets in; the clouds, gradually sinking into warmer layers, nearer the earth, are first redissolved and then, at least partially, precipitated as dew.

On the third day—the weather being still of exactly the same description—my host and I, in the late afternoon, drove down to a point on the lake-shore where he intended to cut the grass for hay.

It is strange how contagious nature study is. To my host the weather had so far been just the weather, of interest only in as much as it might have a bearing on his little crops, in other words, on the pocket-book. Audubon, Darwin, Belt, and others have remarked upon it how sur-

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prising it seemed to people living under more or less primitive conditions that there should be men in the world who make it their chief concern to find out about the habits of wild birds and animals. My host, at first, when he discovered that I made a study of the weather and that, for me, it was something of a living interest, something of an almost animate character, asked me if I did that "for the government." I tried to explain my attitude to him and emphasized that behind my labours—as such they appeared to him—there was no ulterior motive or purpose except that of the immediate pleasure derived from the observation of nature. It seemed very strange to him then. But I saw him often look at the sky after that; and on this particular day he asked me a question which showed quite a shrewd observation in a man who had never enquired into ultimate causes. The question was, "Why is it that clouds near the horizon so often have straight edges on their lower side, whereas they are mostly massed and rolled into rounded forms above?"

Everybody, of course, has, consciously or subconsciously, often observed the fact; and the explanation is simple enough. The kind of cloud which most people have had an opportunity to observe at close quarters is that emitted by the engine of a railroad train when it "blows off steam." There, a vapour, saturated at a temperature much higher than that of the surrounding air, is suddenly blown into

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an atmosphere which, even in summer, is comparatively cold; therefore it condenses into a cloud, that is, into a floating mass of infinitely small bubbles of water which remain suspended in the air. It is a popular error to call this mass steam; steam is invisible like the air; it is invisible inside of the boiler or the tea-kettle and becomes visible only after it is condensed into bubbles by the cooling effect of the admixture of colder air. Now all floating matter, if it is not rigid, tends to arrange itself into a spherical form: several so-called "forces"—cohesion, gravity, surface-tension—unite in producing that effect.—And since I am explaining just now, I might perhaps add why I honour the word "force" so often by quotation-marks. From a phenomenon we deduce a cause; we hardly ever "deduce" an effect from a cause though we expect—"inductively"—certain effects to follow certain causes. But, having deduced the cause, following in that an inborn impulse to humanise natural phenomena, we proudly quote it, dignifying it by the name of "Law," in order to "explain" the phenomena. In reality, all we are really entitled to say is that within our experience certain phenomena are associated with, or follow, certain other phenomena. If this popular process of "explanation" were not so generally known as "science," we should be tempted to liken it to a man's trying to lift himself by his shoe-strings or to propel the sailing boat in which he himself is embarked by blowing into the sail. 164

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But to proceed. As it is with small, continuous masses of non-rigid matter—a drop of water, for instance—so also is it with agglomerations of particles which are free to move with regard to each other and which are comparatively undisturbed by other influences. Thus, floating dust, unless strongly interfered with by wind or other agencies, forms a rounded, more or less spherical cloud—for reasons at least partly analogous to those which serve us to account for the spheroid form of water-drops or, for that matter, of the heavenly bodies which are merely large and very dense dust clouds. Now the real clouds forming in our atmosphere are also, as we have seen, such masses of discontinuous but freely floating matter, just like the clouds emitted by steam engines; and like them they tend to arrange themselves in huge, rounded agglomerations. But the air in which they float is hardly ever at rest. It is stratified in distinct layers of varying density and temperature and moving in often very different directions and at varying rates. Being comparatively heavy—in that respect also they differ from steam which is lighter than air, weighing only about nine-fourteenths of an equal volume of air at the same temperature and pressure—these clouds tend to fall to the lowest level of the layer in which they float. In fact, they fall still lower, into the next layer which in most cases is also in motion, usually however moving in a different direction or at a different rate. If this lower

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stratum is warmer, as often happens, it being closer to the heating surface of the earth, it redissolves whatever bubbles fall into it, thus remaining itself clear, though charged with steam. If it is not warmer than the upper layer, or not sufficiently so, the cloud penetrates it and rain or mist will reach the earth. If it is very much colder, it may even freeze the outside of the bubbles and produce hail—though that process is a considerably more complicated one.

We have, then, generally speaking, in such cases a comparatively cool upper layer in which large masses of condensed bubbles have floated to the bottom, preserving in their upper regions the rounded, more or less spherical outlines peculiar to such agglomerations; and below it a warmer layer in which the bubbles which pass into it are redissolved into invisible steam; it, therefore, cuts off the clouds above in a more or less sharply defined demarcation plane. Since, further, we see the more distant clouds sideways, or in profile, the lower margin appears to us as a more or less straight line, whereas the upper one, also seen in profile, remains rounded and convolute.

“Yes,” said my host when I had given him some such elaborate explanation. “I guess that’s so. If a man looked out a little more, he might get a head for studying, too.” Which just about seemed to hit the point.

Again the next morning showed the same sky; only the wind which came from the north was somewhat fresher.

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My host began to look pretty anxiously for rain; his little crops were beginning to worry him. The soil of the woods was still moist enough to bring forth blossoms in great profusion. Blue, purple, and dark orange were the prevailing colours; and the first herbs with aromatic foliage—the mints, *Agastache*, and others—obtruded on my notice; like the composites, the *Labiatae* are late-comers in our latitudes. But in the open clearings the loose, spongy humus, formed of leaf-mould, though unsurpassed in fertility when it gets enough moisture, dries out very quickly in the summer heat. And yet the barometer was in a constant flurry; great waves of aerial currents swung this way and that way; rain seemed so tantalisingly near all the time. The wind sprang briskly from one quarter into another as the edges of small, local cyclones swept over us. But somehow the clouds that sailed along did not seem to mass together as they would have had to do to produce a soaking rain. Four days in succession now had brought a sprinkling, a sudden, unexpected fall from low-sailing, white clouds. And the fifth day, after a beginning closely similar to that of the preceding four, the clouds formed still more profusely, till, in the afternoon, they covered the whole of the sky in a sheet variegated in different shades of grey. But the wind kept blowing sharply above the tree-tops, and the clouds did not pile up to any great extent. All day it was so cool that a person shivered without a coat.

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About eight o'clock in the evening we had another wind-swept "summer-sky:" two huge rolls or welts of cloud formed in the north; the southern half of the firmament was covered with a "tree" of rather heavy and low cirrus formations: rays of them, all proceeding from one point near the horizon and spreading, fan-shaped, over the heavenly vault; right overhead it was brilliantly clear. The sun stood behind those clouds in the west where a low and far-flung sheet reached down to within about five degrees of the horizon; while the horizon itself was also perfectly clear. This was not a "gate," properly speaking, for no clouds bounded the opening on the sides; but on the west road the gap of the trees made it appear like one.

At sundown the cirrus formation had spread nearly over the whole of the sky; and the light of the sun, striking the clouds from below, through the gap of the horizon, produced a transitory, but surpassingly beautiful play of warm purple and carmine shadings against a background of dark blue and light grey. At all times the cloud layers were single strata. In that respect it was still as it had been for a week: there was no hope of rain.

In the evening the wind turned, for it blew into my window which looked to the south-east. The atmosphere warmed up quite appreciably; and the clouds were quick to redissolve.

As usual, I went home on Friday and returned to Hnafur on Sunday night. 168

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That night was memorable on account of one of the most brilliant electrical displays which I had ever witnessed. The sky had, during the day, been almost perfectly clear. A strong north wind had been blowing, swaying even the largest trees. In spite of that it had been very hot—103 degrees in the shade—with just a tinge of sultriness where the wind did not reach.

When night fell, it seemed for a while as if all the conditions for a real, big summer storm were given. The wind, just before sundown, had been blowing from the south again; not with that extreme violence which sometimes characterizes south winds in summer, but strongly enough to obliterate all minor local currents. As soon as this wind had died down, the clouds had piled up in a manner which looked rather sinister to any but an experienced eye, and the sultriness of the atmosphere left nothing to be desired. On the other hand, the clouds, though of great depth, lacked the two or threefold lining which they require with us to become effective; and they had gathered too gradually; to me it looked rather like a hostile demonstration than like the beginning of actual warfare. The great, bulging cloud masses were too ostentatious and did not present that air of formidable grimness and determination which usually goes with clouds when they mean mischief. Things proceeded in too leisurely a way. Then, too, just after sundown, the whole horizon lighted up with

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flashes; storms seemed to break at too many points at once. There was among all the bursts of light which I observed not one of those vicious, "ugly"-looking seams which mark the swiftly progressive storm. It was the great frequency of the utterly silent flashes and their simultaneous appearance at many points of the horizon rather than any single exertion of the skyey powers which made up the interest of this windless display. "Windless" I say; and that is, strictly speaking, not quite correct. For every now and then a sudden little rush of air would whirl along, each time from a different direction: as if a cat were playing with and pushing a ball of dustcloud—now this way, now that—by deft reaches of its wanton paws.

Not one of the distant storm centres approached, however. It was as if we were in the middle of a huge field of repulsion which kept the charged clouds at a distance. The lightning, for several hours, remained nearly continuous; but it was never followed by audible thunder. The hostile forces were there; but they contented themselves with empty demonstrations.

During the night it remained very warm; and on the morrow, all the clouds having, as if by magic, disappeared, we had one of the hottest days we had had so far.

My host looked quite hopeless, for his little crops were "burning up" as the phrase goes. I encouraged him as much as I could. "Before many days," I said, safe in that prophecy.

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On my way to school I saw now a great many new flowering plants: it was the time of the Labiatae family in truth: mint, horsemint, dragonhead and fennelweed (*Agastache foeniculum*) were in bloom: it seems that these aromatic herbs need a longer time than many others to perfect their complex juices. Apart from the gorgeous lily which still persisted, purple was far and away the prevailing colour now, although I saw some pure-blue peas which seemed to belong to an undescribed variety. But the flower which, on burnt-over lands, outdid all others in its far-flung sheets of blossoms was the great willow-herb—*Epilobium angustifolium*—of Thoreau fame.

For two more days we had that same sultry and quiet weather. At night, it was to all appearances quite clear, and it seemed there was nothing to check radiation; but it remained hot nevertheless. My host, who by that time seemed to think a good deal of myself as a weather prophet, anxiously enquired once more what I thought of the prospects. I told him that in my opinion it was merely a question of a day or two. "The crop is gone," he said dejectedly; "but I might still cut the green straw for feed if we do get rain."

On Wednesday of that week, some time during the afternoon, a great bluster of sudden wind sprang up which brought, God only knew wherefrom in those parts, a huge, choking dust cloud which rolled up to the very skies. And

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then, with clouds that looked as if they would drench and drown the world, a little sprinkling passed over us, ludicrously inadequate as the offspring of such parents. "Parturiunt montes; nascetur ridiculus mus." And they blew over. Though I was not with my host at the time, I am sure he sighed with disappointment.

Again it cleared up; dew condensed in great masses; and it became extraordinarily cool. I began to wonder myself when things would break. The barometer had been rising and falling in a truly erratic way. The aerial turmoil was there; but somehow we were outside of the field of operations.

It is strange how little the woods themselves had to offer to us, to say to us at the time. They were there, and they were one of the great basic facts of this country; but they were, for the moment, a trivial fact which did not seem to have any bearing upon our lives except as the harbour of unimaginable numbers of mosquitoes. We looked at them with a cool, disinterested, and merely appraising eye. They were silently getting ready; preparing things for the winter and for next spring: storing the food for the next season's growth in stem, twig, and root. That also is a kind of harvest, the harvest of air and light; but there is nothing of the bustle and noise and ostentation of our harvest about it. The woods seemed to have retired into themselves. Their very life, intense as it must have been, seemed so remote. 172

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And once more there was a storm in the south-east. But, though we saw the distant clouds rent by tearing flashes and seething with thunder, we got none of it all; we did not even hear the rumblings. And the storm was followed by a cool, springlike day. I began to feel strongly with my host's tantalising disappointment.

I remember with particular vividness the trip to Plymouth Cottage which I made at the end of that week. The day was a white summer day.

Ever darker and gloomier did the forest look as I wheeled along. The air was still cool, with only the merest trace of an ambling breeze astir, which made the aspen leaves tremble but did not sway treetops, branches or even twigs.

As I rode up on the Ridge, seven miles from the Lake, I began to notice signs of a rain that must have fallen there a day or two before. Wherever the sandy soil was not disturbed by wandering cattle or passing vehicles, it had that slightly crusted, finely mammillated or pitted look which rain will produce on every beach. And as I proceeded south-east, the signs multiplied: here and there a slight depression in the ground still held moisture and even water. But the overwhelming evidences of a great storm began to accumulate only when I turned west again for the last seven-mile run straight home. Here the grade was soft

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and spongy; everywhere water stood in the ruts worn out by wagon-wheels; and the swamps to both sides were seething with clouds of delighted mosquitoes. In a hurry I had to put on veil, gloves, and gaiters.

Again I was forcibly impressed with the extent to which our summer-storms are local phenomena. This storm had affected us at Hnafur, in a straight line less than twenty miles away, in nothing except in creating a flurry in barometric pressure. At Plymouth, and in the whole trough between the Ridge and the hills, there had been a sufficiency, if not an abundance of rain during the last three or four weeks; whereas at Hnafur things had almost gone beyond the point where we say they look desperate. Spring rains are general, country-wide; but most of the summer showers extend over very small areas.

During the following week, the last in July, it was hot and sultry again at Hnafur: hot and sultry as it had been so often. The weather was in a rut. Saskatoons were ripe; the birds were feasting on them; and cherries and cranberries were blushing red. A week or so later the wild-fruit harvest would be in full swing.

But the harvest of man's crops, though abundant at Plymouth, was definitely drying, parching, and "burning up" at Hnafur, by the shore of the Lake.

There is compensation in all these things. A wet summer—such a one as we call wet on the prairies—drowns the

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crops of the sloughy lowlands; or at best it sends them up into straw. But in the well-drained bush land near the lake, the more rain, the better. If, on the other hand, the summer is dry, when the drought comes or when the rains do not appear in time, then the crops of the woodland "burn," whereas the sloughs draw upon their reserves of moisture stored underground.

Is not that an epitome of the condition in this whole country? Siberia, India, Africa suffer more or less as wholes when adverse seasons visit them. But Canada is so diversified in its topographic and climatic features that distress in one of its districts is mostly offset by abundance in another. And so, for the masses, there is always food.

HAIL.

Another week followed, swooningly hot, with sharp, dry, changing, but always warm winds from the north-east, north, and north-west.

Then there came a day which was brooding, unbearable, with apparently no wind at all, but with the humidity of the air rising till the perspiration on your skin ceased to evaporate even in the open. I felt clammy and out of sorts from morning to evening. On a short walk to the south I noticed that the grain on the few little clearings had turned bright yellow; it stood no more than four inches high, and there was hardly anything in the heads.

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During the night the sky was quite clear, the stars twinkling and blazing in an extraordinary fashion for a summer night. No dew fell, however; which was a sign that the airy vapours must have reached such a degree of saturation as to interfere seriously with the cooling of the ground by radiation. Nor had any mist formed as I had half expected; it must have been too warm for that.

But the next morning, when I went to school, with the air still in the same condition as the day before, I had the strongest presentiment of a coming storm of unusual violence. My skin seemed to tingle and to creep with the heat. The sky was of a peculiar, heavy, gloomy blue; and the sun shone down like a consuming fire which seemed to be of a different world.

In the afternoon the denouement arrived.

About two o'clock a sudden change in the light made me step out of the stuffy little schoolroom into the open where I looked about. Most of the children had from two to four miles to go; and every bit of their trip was through the dense wood and over more or less swampy ground. I did not like to think of their being caught in what was coming. So I dismissed them, urging them to scamper home as fast as their little legs would carry them. I myself, having only a mile to go, and that on a clearly marked trail, lingered in the schoolhouse for another hour, getting things ready against the morning.

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Then I, too, went.

Meanwhile the cloud bank which had arisen in the north-west was mounting, mounting. It was of a dark-grey, iron colour with many lighter-grey masses in front of it. These latter looked as if placed on their background as dabs of whitish paint by a giant painter's brush; they also looked as if they were half luminous, suffused with a strange, unearthly light, a dull, rayless light, uncanny and phosphorescent like decaying wood in the moist shade of an impenetrable forest. The sun meanwhile, as is usual in such cases, redoubled in fervour; and yet, every now and then, I felt a sharp chill striking me in isolated spots of my perspiring body. The air was a turmoil of seething currents and counter-currents; and yet there was no perceptible wind. I had the impression, which probably corresponded to the facts, as if there were a descending draft of air which brought down detached spheres and streaks of a colder layer of air above. If a dry, cold, and therefore heavier stratum is superimposed upon a strongly heated, moisture-laden, and therefore lighter layer of air, an extremely unstable condition arises in the atmosphere—a condition which, when disturbed, is bound to result in a catastrophic stabilisation of things; and that was exactly how everything felt: unstable—if I may describe it by such a vague word.

In front of the huge, ragged cloud bank, preceding it

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at a tremendous rate of speed, I saw now, whenever in hurrying forward I looked back, a rolling, fluttering, boiling festoon of low, loose, vapoury masses. They probably consisted of those dabs of whitish clouds which had looked so luminous from a distance. There was nothing luminous about them any longer; they looked dark, grim, excited; they were in a maelstrom of whirling rotation; and on they swept like gigantic, animated steam-rollers.

The sun was obscured by this time.

The moment when I came out on the grade leading west, where the view to the east carried out on the Lake, I was once more struck with a feeling of uncanny portents: the most distant things on the horizon—the brush, the grass on a beach slope of the tongue of land marking off our bay—looked so palpably near and distinct that you could not have imagined them to be miles away.

And then, just before I had crossed the road on a slant, just in front of my host's yard, a blast of intensely cold, icy air struck me, nearly sweeping me off my feet: it sounded, first like the rolling of an enormous surf-wave approaching from behind, and then like a single beat on some gigantic drum; and all was quiet again except for a single crash which followed like an echo: that rush of air had snapped two large trees on the margin of the road-allowance and thrown them across the fence. Now, be-

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lated, I heard the sudden "ping" of the wires which had snapped; and having been stretched beyond endurance before they broke, they were coiling and rearing backwards, nearly catching me with their barbs, and writhing like snakes under the sudden blow of a whip.

Things were happening so fast that I cannot tell at what precise moment they did begin to happen. I know that, without stopping to unfasten the gate, I had just jumped through the newly created gap in the fence when I lost all bearings and could no longer tell which way to go. For the rain had suddenly begun to fall in a nearly solid mass of water, taking my breath away and drowning out even the light. I simply groped forward; and, gasping for air, drenched to the very skin, dripping like a dog after a swim before he has shaken himself, I found myself in the horse-stable, glad of the shelter, though I laughed at the wetting I had received.

Then, abruptly, there came, rent by wild lightning and whipped by bellowing thunder, the dull roar of hail. Imagine a hundred hollow bridges, and a hundred lurching freight-trains thundering over them at fifteen miles an hour, with yourself standing under the central one; and you will have a faint idea of the noise. The house stands opposite the stable, not more than a hundred and fifty feet away from it, but I could not see it. I could not see a thing outside the stable, except a piece of ground where

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the hailstones rebounded in a frantic dance. Even in the stable I divined more than saw the rumps of the two drivers in their stall. The work horses were not there; and so I inferred that my host had been caught in the field.

The fall of hail lasted for maybe ten minutes; it consisted at first only of the ordinary, rounded little balls which are familiar to everybody; then they increased in size till they reached the dimensions of sparrow's eggs. It was at this stage that, driven by the wind as they were, they broke pane after pane of the little window in the west-wall of the stable. A minute or so later I noticed strange, irregular, slab-like projectiles among the round pellets of ice—such as I had never seen or heard of before in northern latitudes, though in South Africa they are said to be fairly common*; those that I picked up were about an inch long, three quarters of an inch wide and

*Since the above was written, I have heard of—though not seen—a similarly destructive hailstorm in which slabs occurred; if I can trust my authority, they were of much larger dimensions. The hailstorm passed over a very restricted area in north-central Manitoba, not far from the little town of Glenella. I drove through the territory afflicted the day after the storm; and a peculiar feature of it was that it had proceeded along nearly straight lines. At first I could not believe that the destruction which I witnessed had been wrought by a natural agency; the fields that were bared of their crops looked more like a summer-fallow than anything else, so straight were the lines that marked them off. Summer 1919.

The same district was again visited by a very destructive hailstorm on August 4, 1921.

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a quarter of an inch thick. Coming as they did like a veritable barrage, they were formidable missiles; but they did not continue to fall for very long; all the grains became ball-like again; and then they decreased in size, till at last nothing came down any longer but rain. It, however, though probably not quite so much with the effect of a cloud-burst now, fell in unheard-of masses for another two hours or longer. The yard, as far as I could see it, looked like a lake. The water stood six inches deep on hollow ground.

Then, slowly, as if developed on a grey sheet of photographic film, the outline of the house began to appear on the opposite side of the yard; and detail after detail "came out." I saw now that the shutters of the windows were closed and that in front of one window which had no shutters boards were fastened, apparently nailed.

Being wet through anyway, I went over through the last of the rain. A cow was standing in the water under a shed, humped up and shivering with cold. The buggy which had been standing alongside the ice-house was upturned, probably by that first wild blast of cold air. The yard all over was covered with from six to ten inches of water; but the garden behind emerged from it like a boggy island. It looked like a sorry waste, its green luxuriance demolished by the hail and its well-tilled ground reclaimed by the swamp from which it had come. Little pitiable

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stumps were all that was left of the proud canes of sweet corn with their banners of streaming green leaves.

My hostess was alone and in a flurry of hysterical excitement. She had a lamp burning in the darkened house. Yes, she had closed the shutters and protected the shutterless window as soon as she had seen the storm approaching, for she had anticipated hail. Now her cellar was filling up with the flood, and she was busy salvaging her provisions. The cow that I had seen in the shed had been expected to calve within a few days: and now she had come home without her calf: she must have left it in the bush where it would be lost. A word of comfort seemed to have the effect of an insult; utter misery was at least spectacular. If only her husband were at home! But even he was probably hurt by the hail!

I pondered the series of real and possible misfortunes for a moment and then decided to get into some dry clothes and in slicker and south-wester to hitch up the team of drivers and to go out after my host. I told her of my plan, and she seemed grateful.

It was no easy task for one man to right the buggy, but at last I managed.

When I drove out of the gate, I found that the log-culvert across the ditch had been swamped and floated away; for the ditch was a boiling, muddy-yellow torrent now. It was still raining, but softly and mildly as it

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rains in spring. The murky darkness was giving way to a white, diffused light; the almost leafless woods were like a steaming hothouse.

Somehow I contrived to get up on the road; and so I drove down to the lake. By that time, about three hours after the breaking of the storm, blue patches had appeared in the northern sky. The clouds above resembled those emitted by a locomotive—loose, cottony, harmless-looking things they were. The temperature, which had fallen very sharply during the storm, was rising again.

The meadows along the lake had not suffered very much: the wild grass is tough and elastic; its sod is matted into a yielding but resistant carpet; there was no water standing on it either, though it was traversed by a network of little rills, hurrying over the gentle slope into the natural receptacle of all this run-off, the Lake. But in the fringe of the bush along which I drove to the south the foliage was decimated indeed; the huge tangles of raspberry canes stood bare of fruit, their leaves hanging down, broken and shredded by the hail. When I reached the meadow where my host had been cutting, I looked about but did not see him anywhere. Then a shout rang out from the right, and my eye discovered an abandoned stable in the bush, and in it my host and his horses, dry and well; in front of it stood the wheel-truck of his hay-rack, the rack itself having been blown off and thrown some thirty or forty

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feet to the south, against a clump of trees where it stood upended.

I gave my host the news of the damage done in his garden, and he merely shrugged his shoulders; and when I told him about the cow that must have calved in the bush and apparently had deserted her calf, he simply remarked, "We've got to find it."

Meanwhile he had been getting his horses ready so he could lead them behind the buggy; and now he climbed in beside me.

"Let's go this way," he said and pointed to a barely visible trail through the forest. "I'd like to have a look at the barley."

I had not thought of this further possibility of loss for him and said so, expressing my regret; but he took it very philosophically. "I am insured against hail," he said. "I wasn't insured against drought."

Wherever the ground was level or hollow in the bush, great pools of water had accumulated; wherever it sloped, torrents were draining the rain away, washing deep, canyon-like gullies into the loose mouldy soil and baring the network of roots underneath. Truly, the whole of the woods made a singularly insular impression.

When we reached the small field of barley, it looked like low and miserable stubble. I jumped out of the buggy to inspect it more closely, sinking as I did so to my ankles

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into the soft, muddy soil. The inch or so of the stalks which had been left standing was split and beaten into sorry-looking threads: the heads and leaves had, literally, been driven into the ground. The whole field, on a closer view, looked not so much like stubble as like a closely cropped, gigantic head of thinly growing, short, and bristly hair.

We went home and had our supper; after which my host went to enlist the help of a neighbour in the search for the calf. Since I volunteered, there were three of us, besides two dogs, when we started out about sundown. A nearly full moon promised further light, for the sky had now cleared completely. Not a breath of wind stirred anywhere through the woods.

In the morning the cow had gone out with the rest of the little herd; for here in the bush the range was free, of course. So we had the tracks they had made in coming home to guide us. These tracks came from the west, along the road. How the mosquitoes could have escaped the hail, was beyond my understanding; but here they were in huge clouds and more sanguinary than ever; they stung anywhere; I suffered most on my shoulder-blades, for even clothing did not give protection.

We followed the road for a mile and a half, wading and splashing through unspeakable mud. The ditches on both sides were yellow torrents, taking the drainage out to

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the Lake. Then the cattle tracks led across one of these ditches and into the woods to the north. We jumped the torrent and started to penetrate into the tangle of the bush. The trail scattered here, and henceforth every step was guesswork.

Never shall I forget the next few hours: they were the most bewildering experience of these northern woods that I can imagine. We did not walk; we were everlastingly climbing: scaling an indescribable maze of fallen trees in all stages of decay. It lay like an irregular hollow platform over the soil, pitted with huge openings through which we were careful not to fall to the soil below; for the soil below was a quagmire of water and soft mud.

We had not yet gone more than a quarter of a mile or so before we started a couple of deer which jumped and fled, with the ill-trained dogs at once in hot and noisy pursuit. I do not rightly know who jumped more, the deer or we. At any rate, with the dogs gone, we were left entirely to our own resources; which really did not matter, because the dogs that we had would not have been of any help anyway; but it had a psychological effect. We separated, therefore, and proceeded at a distance of about one hundred feet from each other, calling out frequently, so as not to get lost.

In the dim, ghostly light from the moon—a light soft and cruel at once, drawing light and shadow with an al-

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most inexorable pencil and leaving unheard-of details to the imagination—that filtered down through the shredded foliage and the bare boughs overhead, the white trunks of the aspens, uncannily white, glistened and gleamed with moisture which seemed exuded from the stems. Everywhere the vapour in the air began to condense into a thready labyrinth of impenetrable mist which was black in the shade, bluish-white in the rays of the light. We ourselves were soon wetted through up to our hips; and the trees kept dripping, dripping down upon us. When we came out on one of the little open glades which are scattered through the forest, the ground there being too boggy to support poplar growth, we sometimes had to jump, in its margin, from tree to tree, skirting the swampy ground in which we should have sunk; and sometimes, when the reedy sod underneath seemed tough enough to hold together under our weight, we waded through with the water up to our knees. Everywhere trees leaned against each other, making the most bewildering crisscross pattern of trunks. The whole of the woods was pervaded with a mixture of two smells: that of moist, decaying wood and that of growing mushrooms.

It must have been eleven o'clock when we were ready to give up the search. We assembled to talk things over. None of us liked the idea of retracing our steps over the treacherous, slippery accumulation of fallen trees. I sug-

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gested that cattle could hardly have gone here without leg-breaking and that, therefore, we had proceeded past their range. But both my companions dismissed that objection: cattle had their regular paths which they knew as well as we did our roads: in daytime we might have followed those paths easily enough without climbing over any logs. To leave the calf in the bush meant, of course, to abandon it; if the mosquitoes did not kill it, it would be devoured by the wolves. But it seemed that there was nothing to do except to find our best way out. West of where we were, a long slough ran through the bush, at right angles or nearly so to the road and crossing it; my companions decided to strike out for that slough and to regain the road along its margin; the grass, it is true, stood hip-high there; but we were soaked anyway.

Just then, not far away, the calf bawled.

In the uncanny gleam of the moon-lit mist we looked at each other.

"There," I said and pointed in one direction.

But neither of my companions agreed with me; nor did they agree among themselves. It developed that here were three men in the bush, trying to determine the location of a calf by its call; and every one of the three was deaf on one ear and therefore unable to distinguish direction by sound. The rather remarkable thing was that every one of them used this argument against the other two but not against

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himself. We were on the point of quarrelling about it, taking the statements of plain truths for malevolent insinuations. Our nerves were wrought up. But at last more prudent counsel prevailed. We agreed to separate again and to proceed in our three different directions till we had slowly counted up to one hundred, and then to stop and to return to a central point.

We started out; but when we had counted through the number agreed upon and called to each other, we found that we were not very far apart; for progress in this tangle was slow, what with climbing over the fallen trunks and groping our way through those that were standing. We agreed, without returning to our starting point, to proceed for another one hundred seconds. None of us, of course, knew by this time any longer which his original direction had been; for the manner of our progress necessitated constant turning and twisting. Nevertheless, to save my face, I looked for the moon before I climbed on.

The decaying trunks underneath were black like charred trees, for they were divested of their bark; and when I was counting somewhere in the beginning of the nineties, spacing the numbers—as I had no doubt the others were doing likewise—so as to draw them out, I was just carefully lifting my leg over one last trunk, groping with my foot for something to step on beyond, when the black thing under the fork of my legs suddenly repeated the bawl of

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the calf. My heart jumped into my throat, and for a moment I was unable to speak or to stir. But a second later I threw myself down, firmly hugged the calf to my body, and sang out, "I've got him!"

There would not have been any need to hold the poor beast, for it had become tightly wedged in between two trunks.

With a great hello of cheering and with astonishing speed for two old men my companions joined me.

The calf was literally covered with mosquitoes. I rubbed my hands over its neck, and they came away dripping with the blood the insects had sucked into their paunches.

My host shouldered the little beast; and we started west, quite revived by our success. Just then we heard, first the howl of a single lone wolf and then the yapping of an answering pack. We had been in time!

Fortunately we were just at the edge of the big slough; and soon we were out in its waist-deep grass.

It was half an hour past midnight when we got home; but our hostess felt so elated at this reduction of her misfortunes that she prepared what in this pioneer-country might pass as a banquet for the rescuing crew of three.

THE LAST TRIP HOME.

And so the week came in which I was to take leave of

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the northern woods. The school was in working order; the board of trustees had been told what in my opinion should be done to induce future teachers to stay; and so, within a few days, I was to return to the so-called wider duties in the town at the southern end of those long, weary, and joyful winter-drives which have been described in another volume.

The day before I left we held a great picnic on one of the nearby beaches of the lake. It was the first of the golden days in the halycon month of our year: fit setting for the revels of the young and for the more sedate and almost sorrowful speech of the older folk: for the recent destruction still cast its shadow over all who had lost through it. In six or seven weeks I had made many friends. It was as if I had become part of their lives, and they of mine; and so they had insisted on my joining them in this outing. The day was a Wednesday. On Thursday I intended for the last time to set out for the little cottage on the gravel-ridge in the muskeg swamp. There I was to stay till Sunday, for on Monday morning I had to be back at my post.

But on Thursday it rained, and not only rained but poured. Till ten o'clock I hesitated about going, in hopes that it might clear up. But it was a forlorn hope from the beginning. Meanwhile I thought of the little two-year-old girl that was looking forward to my coming and of the

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woman that was my wife and of whom I have also given glimpses in those other pages. At last I made up my mind to go in spite of the rain. I left my baggage behind—a suitcase which I had taken on the carrier of my wheel when I came out; it was to be forwarded now by the next opportunity that offered.

When at last, after taking leave from my host and his wife, I set out, I found at once that on these new silt roads the trip meant walking. The grade, consisting as it did of the newly dug-up clay of the subsoil, was sticky to such an extent that at every step I picked up some ten or twenty pounds of mud with each foot. Every hundred yards or so I had to stop and strip the marly soil from the wheels of the bicycle with my hands. I myself wore an old, disreputable-looking raincoat which had a few weak spots, it is true, but otherwise did yeoman-service. An old travelling cap allowed the rain, though it cleared my eyes, to wash the tip of my nose. Gaiters and supposedly waterproof shoes completed the outfit in which I braved the day.

In the older settlements of the prairie the roads are flanked by a sward of grass; but here no grass had had a chance as yet to spring up. So it was the almost bottomless road for me. Every now and then the rain redoubled. Some cloud, still lower than those that formed the ground-

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mass of the dark, low, shaggy ceiling of the sky, swept past, drenching the woods with a rattle of heavier drops. Whenever that happened, I took refuge under some tree although the protection was largely imaginary. The drops were not quite so frequent there, it is true; but where they fell, they did not come as drops but as little streams shed by the leaves of the tree.

Yet I gained one advantage from these stops: They caused me to attend to the colours and forms of the foliage and fruits about me, thus withdrawing my mind from the discomfort and toil of the trip.

Marvellously delicate purples tinted the plums: these trees stood scattered in the margin of the woods. I had never noticed them before: it took this touch of colour to reveal them. Still rarer were the small pincherry-trees. They, too, were betrayed by the dark-red drupes of their fruit. And the rain enhanced the depth and brilliancy of their colour to an almost miraculous degree. All about me there was evidence that only a few miles from the lake the hail could not have been half as destructive as at the place of "my host". Even raspberries still clung, half dried, half consumed by birds and worms, to their canes.

But the foliage of the smaller shrubs and herbs, wet and glistening under the rain, presented still more of interest. In fact, every now and then I forgot all about

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being wet and chilly myself and became completely absorbed in my examination of what I saw. Strawberry leaves were as red as the cherries: spotted black and white, looking mouldy in spots and as beautiful as mouldy preserves looked in the cellar at home. Scarlet and crimson also coloured the foliage of the dogwood; it, too, being spotted in glossy black. But the most surprising colours were to be found on the large, tri-foliolate leaves of the wild sarsaparilla which sparingly hid the forest-floor wherever the fallen tree-trunks did not lie too thick. Each single leaflet glowed in four or five colours: there was a bright lemon-yellow in tiny spots; there was brown, there was red, and there was a purple-brown of a most delicate shade; and all these colours were embedded in spots on a background of dark olive-green which seemed especially designed to give them relief.

One belated shrub I found still in bloom in these woods: the meadowsweet—*Spiraea salicifolia*—its feathery, paniced blossoms, resembling those of the chokecherry, but on a smaller scale, in sore plight from the rain. This was interesting to me because I had been used to note its bloom as one of the latest in our southern prairie woods, some one hundred miles to the south, at a time fully a month ahead of its flowering here.

Of herbs there were many new ones in bloom, the Blazing Star—*Liatris scariosa*—most prominent among

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them, for it is fitly named: its bright, reddish-purple flowerhead truly blazing from among the green of the tangled carpet underfoot like a fallen star. Rattlesnake-root was another, with its wide, three-lobed leaves, it being not much behind its season farther south.

These little observations were, of course, not made at any one time; but now here, now there, in the intervals of my weary plodding along the road. It took me four hours to make the seven miles to the end of the Ridge. And when I reached it, I was wet all through and well-nigh exhausted from the labour of pushing my wheel through the mud. But I was counting on the reward to come when I reached the road of fine sand and gravel on the Ridge where I could fly along irrespective of the rain. I was hungry, too; but I refrained from entering the store lest I should get too warm there and afterwards suffer all the more. I lingered about the place, though, for some time, recouping.

When I straddled my wheel again, after having cleaned it of its encrustation of marly clay, I was soon streaked along my back, from head to seat, with a ridge of gravelly sand splashed up by the hind wheel of my vehicle. There was also a new source of discomfort, for the road, though firm enough to carry my wheel, was covered with pools of collected rain-water; and this water splashed up, under my raincoat, as I shot along with ever increasing speed.

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But I had the wind from behind, and so I heeded it not.

This was the first of the country-wide rains of late summer which herald the fall. Henceforth the local nature of our summer-showers would no longer be prominent; and we had to expect the first killing frosts: in fact, they were late in coming, that year, in the northland. I have observed them there as early as in the middle of August; and during those two summers which I was to spend there as a convalescent, my gardens froze during every month of the growing season. It is a striking sign of the fertility of soil and climate that even so we did not have to go without sweet corn, cucumbers, and beans, although the latter needed covering up over night on more than one occasion.

The rain was continuous as it is apt to be in these first great falls that are not showers; but it was by no means uniform. Every now and then there was, in addition to the background—if I may call it that—of the steady rain, a supervening shower, short but rattling, which made my body stream with trickles and little brooks of water that felt colder than the ordinary rain. It was during one of these sudden fits of redoubled rainfall that I sighted, half-ways along the Ridge, an abandoned stable, its walls a mere lattice-work of rather thin poles; but the roof was shingled and looked quite tight. So I made for it thinking I would enjoy a few minutes of intermission.

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To my surprise I found, however, on approaching that it was already tenanted. By its side, in the lee of it, close under the eaves of the roof, an old, topless buggy stood drawn up, with a sorry-looking but tough little pony hitched between the shafts: that Indian pony I knew. It belonged to an Anglican clergyman, hardly any longer in middle life, who yet looked faithfully after the needs of his many scattered missions in the northland. I will not withhold his name: he was, and I hope still is, a hero unknown to fame: it was the Reverend Mr. Fyles. And there he stood, in straw hat and thin overcoat, under the roof of the stable. His almost white hair under the straw hat was wet like a sponge, and out of it steady streamlets of water kept running down his nose and his cheeks; and on each side of the face a separate little stream found its way along the ear inside of his celluloid collar; for the roof of the shelter turned out to be far from tight.

We shook hands, of course.

"Few people," he said with a sigh, "know what teachers and preachers have to go through. I had to give my pony a rest, for he has made more than twenty miles to-day."

"Well," I answered, "you beat mine in that; as you beat most teachers for few of us but stay at home in weather like this. But I want to get to Plymouth to see my wife and child before I go south to town."

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And thus we talked on for another five minutes; and then we shook hands again and mounted our vehicles: he his buggy, and I my wheel.

As the north-west wind made the trees sway, the tall larches and spruces looked exactly as if they were shaking themselves to throw the water out of their pelt. You could sometimes see the denser spray clearly outlined against the grey sky above the tops of the poplars.

In an hour or so I reached the little town on the Ridge, at the end of steel. You might have thought, when you saw it, that it had gone to sleep for this inhospitable day. Since I knew that I should have no further use for my wheel which would henceforth be an encumbrance only, I left it behind, in the care of one of the merchants, to be fetched whenever the weather should have cleared up.

Beginning from here, on the seven-mile stretch to the west, I had the wind half against me and half from the right. But, the brush for the most part crowding the road pretty closely, I was protected from its worst attacks. It was only where the sloughs opened out that I suffered at all. I had, at the store, provided myself with some biscuits enclosed in a tin; and so I kept munching them while I plodded along.

There are landscapes that need "foul weather" to reveal their nature. This one was of their number. The burnt-over forest has that dreariness which is almost depressing

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in sunshine and under a cheerful sky. But in rain and mist it becomes grandiose and strangely impressive. The black, charred stumps, glistening with water, soaked with it, look like monuments of a world that belongs to the past. And the swamp is next of kin to the cloud. Mists and fogs are of common occurrence in these parts, especially late in summer and in early fall.

Being rid of the encumbrance of my wheel, my progress was better on this grade. I also found that the mud was thinner here than it had been on the first seven miles from the lake; and being thinner, it was less adhesive. It took me two hours or so to reach the last hill east of home. When I topped it, a mile and a half from the cottage, I saw school and house on the opposite ridge. There they lay behind the translucent curtain of rain, lonely and quiet beyond the power of description.

No doubt, so I thought, wife and child have by this time given over waiting. No doubt the little girl was almost as cheerful most of the time as if she had not been expecting me. At intervals only she would still ask her mother, "Do you think daddy can't come any longer?"

But when at last, in the early dusk, I crossed the bridge over the great master ditch, a few hundred feet to the east of the yard, I saw the door of the cottage open; and there stood wife and child, the child all joy, but the woman half worried on my account. I hastened up, over the

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stones of the rising road; and when I came within hailing distance, I shouted as cheerfully as I could, "Well, did you still expect me to come?"

"I knew you would come," said my wife, "and that was exactly why I was worried, in this weather."

"The weather is glorious," I replied, "for coming home and getting into dry clothes."

An hour after that, when I had had my supper, I sat in a camp chair in the tiny kitchen, my little girl on my knees; and we were all three looking out through the open door into the darkness where uninterruptedly the rain descended.

I had two days ahead: two days of freedom; and on the third day I started out for the first of those drives which have furnished the topic of a different story.



“On the sloping
triangle
a few stooks were left.”

VIII. HARVEST



THE field was in the sloping corner of a farm, bounded to the east, in the winding hollow, by a sluggish creek which was fringed with bush. The time was late in summer and late in the evening of a perfect day.

The fields to the west stretched away in the form of a low and gently rising dome; and over these fields there came from the distance the muffled throb of the threshing machine. Everywhere the air was filled with that fine, pervading straw-dust which floats away from the blower when it piles the coarser shreds and the chaff; and there was also a smell: the dry, dilute, and homey smell of burning straw.

On the sloping triangle of the field in front of me a few dozen stooks or so were left as if forgotten when the main stream of the feverish work of the crews began to flow in another direction. These stooks looked strangely ruddy-brown in that almost tangible light from the setting sun in the west, behind the dome of the fields. The trees in the hollow, along the black water of the creek, burned like green gold; eerie flames they were, lighted by fairies to close us in; beyond them there lay infinity and eternity. And over it all stood the dark-blue vault of the sky, perfectly blue, of the halcyon blue of the Indian sum-

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mer. The light of the sun, coming as it did nearly parallel with the surface of the earth, through unmeasured depths of the atmosphere, was toned down to a strange, golden-brown incandescence.

I looked back over my shoulder, as I sat there, facing the hollow. The sun himself was a ball of liquid gold as it touched the horizon, heatless, rayless. It was as if the air itself were luminous, as indeed it was, by virtue of the blower-thrown fragments of straw that floated in it.

And yet, already darkness rose from the hollow through which the creek flowed in that enchanted landscape: timidly it rose, tentatively, as if it might yet have to flee; and so far it rose no higher than the foot of the tree trunks while the tops, flame-shaped, still stood above that lake of shadow from which they sprang. You could not but anticipate evening-coolness from the shadows there that welled out of the ground: evening-coolness after the heat of the day.

And that very moment a team came from the west, from behind me. Two black horses drew the rack which came to gather in the last of the stooks at this corner. There was a single man who drove: a medium-sized, stout, bearded man who looked strangely serious, strangely knowing, as he guided the horses slantways across the field of my vision where I sat, motionless. For a moment after he had pulled his horses to a stop he stood on the platform

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of his rack and looked about. Like myself he felt hushed. Like myself he weighed and handled and probed that moment of all eternity. Between us there was an instant sympathy established.

I followed an impulse and went down to him. He looked at me for a second, and then, silently, he pointed to where a pitchfork stuck in the ground. I felt it a compliment thus to be invited to partake in the noblest labour. He let himself down from the rack, without unnecessary hurry, and yet expeditiously. I could plainly see now that he was of Slavonic origin. And the moment he was on the ground he started to pitch the sheaves from the stook on to the rack. He worked slowly, but with a sureness and certainty of aim that told more than any mere haste could have done; and as nearly as I could I did as he did. But I soon saw that I could not possibly keep pace with him, for all that he seemed to work in the most leisurely way. Every now and then he drove the horses a few steps ahead, so that the load which began to pile up was again between two new stooks. Then I saw that he never took a single sheaf with his fork, but always two and often more; so I was no longer astonished that his side of the load grew up so much faster than mine.

And then there came a moment when it was necessary for one of us to climb up on the load and to receive the sheaves from the other who pitched them. Not a word

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was said, nor was the work delayed; but somehow my companion conveyed to me the desire that it should be I. And since I accepted his leadership, I climbed up in silence.

Meanwhile the sun had sunk behind the dome of the fields in the west, and only a glittering line of his upper edge betrayed for a moment where he had sunk. At once the distinction between the lengthening shadows and the remaining landscape was gone. The lake of darkness had risen from the hollow to my companion's knees.

And as I looked down upon him from my height, he became a symbol to me of harvesting man: of the toiler of the earth, of him who feeds the teeming millions of other worlds into which he does not care to pry. They, the teeming millions, may think that he is their servant; but he knows better: not they are his masters; his master is one, his master is God. } Curiously I looked down upon him in that half dusk. And when he picked up with his fork what he intended to lift, I could only marvel at his strength and skill. Slowly, without hurry, but also without waste of time, he would force the fork with its tremendous load up, with a steady exertion, till he held the handle high overhead; and then he would throw the sheaves off with the slightest of jerks, so that they fell just where he wanted them; and there was nothing left for me to do. His body seemed to shorten and to broaden when he did that; and never did I see a wrong move or a lost motion; never hurry, never delay.



Soon we topped
the height.

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Shortly our rack held all it could hold; and at the same time the corner of the field was empty. While my companion climbed up from behind I looked about.

The lake of darkness in the hollow had risen, as if fed by capacious underground springs; and it almost enveloped us now even though we were high on the load. The trees in the hollow to the east, along the creek, stood black against a dark-blue sky from which first stars leapt out; but the fields to the west, over the dome of land, still lay in a transparent dusk; and where the sun had set, the sky was white. The humming of the distant engine was intensified. To the smell of smoke from the burning straw-stacks that of condensing moisture was added by now; in the hollow an impalpable haze had formed; and the smell of the smoke felt strangely warm and acrid to my nostrils. The straw-dust in the air settled down on shoulders and back like dew.

My companion came to the front and took the lines. In silence we drove up to the dome of the fields in the west. And as we rose, we saw the plains lighted all around by the gigantic torches of the fires which consumed the straw and which looked like beacons that conveyed a message. Soon we topped the height, and the engine appeared in front. We came from the east; and as we approached, it and all accessories stood outlined like black monsters against the white of the western sky. The swinging belt

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that ran from engine to separator seemed to be alive and to embody the force of strange underground helpers in league with the black human figures that hurriedly pitched off the last few loads. When we reached this scene, we had to wait five minutes or so before it came our turn. Not a word was spoken; not even when we drove up to the feeder: the horses themselves knew every motion required.

Half an hour later we were on the road to the still distant farmstead: the horses trotted along, eager to reach the stable that was their home and that held the mangers bulging with hay. Darkness, blue and yet transparent, everywhere. I could still just see my companion, however. The night air brushed past us, cool and refreshing after the toil. Yet my companion was glistening with sweat; and on his bare arms powerful muscles played. His face seemed radiant with a strange smile.

This man was to me, on that evening, while we were rattling along the road, the incarnation of all that is fine and noble in bodily labour: of the joy of muscle and sinew that want to play in mere exertion and that yet rather chooses work than play. I almost envied him his strength, as I surely envied him his avocation; for such it was that made him turn to the work he did.

And as I scanned his face which looked pale in the darkness, I saw something still finer in it which found expres-

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sion in that strange smile. He became to me the man who stands squarely on the soil and who, from *his* soil—his, no matter whether he owns it or not; and likely he was no more than a hired helper on this particular farm—who from *his* soil reaches out with tentative mind, and with a great seriousness—far beyond that of a mere thinker or scientist—gropes his sure and unmistaken way into the great, primeval mysteries which are the same to-day as at the dawn of history.

IX. THE THIRD VIGNETTE: LOVE IN AUTUMN



HE little whitewashed loghouse still stands in the bush. The farm, it is true, has moved to the south, to the corner of the crossroad which was built ten years ago. There, a framehouse with a barn and a buggy-shed speaks of prosperity: young folk are living there: John's and Ellen's son who has married a "lady." He has his own cares and sorrows and little tribulations; and no doubt he also has his own joys and pleasures. The three girls, too, have been married a long while already; and they are scattered over three provinces of this broad continent. But the youngest boy was drowned when swimming one day in May in the ice-cold creek, some twenty years ago.

John and Ellen still live in that tiny log house at the north-west corner of the place which once was their homestead. They are old people now; life has stretched away into the past that once lay all in the future. Has it brought fulfilment of dreams? Oh yes, it has! It seems a long life: three score years and ten for the younger of them, the man; and yet it seems so short a span, viewed in retrospection: like the afternoon of a summer day: a long, long afternoon, it is true.

The time of the year is the fall. The leaves of the

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trees are brittle; goldenrod and asters bloom; the birds are congregated in flocks. All day long the pulsating hum of the threshing machine has been sounding across the bush from the south where the fruit of the field was being garnered in golden streams. Only a little while ago has the shrill whistle of the engine called the workers to their rest. It is still warm: it is the retrospective time of the year. And the time of day is the evening: shadows stretch: already even this living day has become a memory. So shortly ago the light of the sun still shone on the little white house. Now it is huddled in the dusk; and the light of a lamp asserts itself dimly and cosily, shining through the small, square window in the wall to the west.

An old man, tall but bent, standing somewhat painfully, with one hand applied to his side, works the handle of the pump on the yard with the gnarled fingers of the other; and a tall and still handsome woman stands in the door of the house, white-haired, it is true—as you can see even in the dusk—but still tall and handsome so long as you see the figure only, not the face. Age has told more on the man in this case than on the woman. But when you see their features in the light, you find them both hollow-eyed and hollow-cheeked: their hair is thin and white and glossy like silk.

He comes across the yard and carries his pail: she holds the door for him as he enters.

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"It's still nice," she says, "Let's sit outside." Her once deep contralto has strangely risen in pitch. No need to tell you she is old when you hear that voice.

"All right," he answers in a childish treble.

And so they go out and sit on the bench by the door, as of old, in silence. For a long while they sit; and darkness rises like a flood that wells up and engulfs the world.

Thoughts reach out and grope back: thoughts of joy, thoughts of sorrow. These two have reached life's goal. There is no future to dream of: there is the past.

And as they sit, John is aware of a sudden that the woman by his side is shaken by sobs.

He understands; no need for words. "You're minding Jim?" he asks in a whisper which is dimmed by sympathy.

"I can't get over it," sobs Ellen. "Why did he have to die?"

"Life and death," says John, nodding his bony head, "life and death. God's counsel, mother. His Will be done."

"Is it just?" she says. "We live; he's dead."

And again he nods. "God's counsel," he repeats; and his words trail away, as it were, into silence. But once more his thought becomes speech. "Mind how he fell with me from the hayrack when he was five years old?" he asks.

"Yes," she replies; "and you held him; and you've never

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walked straight again because you twisted your back so he wouldn't get hurt. And then he had to be drowned!"

"Don't cry, mother," he says, "don't cry. We've had our share of grief, true enough. But John, he's doing fine. And the girls. That's something. The grandchildren, too."

"Yes," says Ellen; "but I scolded him just the day he died, because he had torn his coat on the fence. If I hadn't done that. . . ."

And so she breaks down; and as she sits there, the tears course over her cheeks, and her body is shaken. And John does not interfere any longer.

Night has come; and night is beauty. Stars spangle the sky. A great triangle blazes out right in front: three stars: like a sign. The woman's crying trails off into sobs; and slowly, slowly even the sobs die down.

Softly her right hand steals across the darkness between them; and he holds it in his two. Peace seems to flow from the contact as he pats that hand. And slowly her head sinks against his shoulder and rests there. And then a whispered word comes across: "But I've had you!"

"And you've been a blessing to me," he says with a catch in his high-pitched voice. "The Lord be praised!"

The feeling of that companionship which still endures conquers grief. Love tempered by sorrow has welded two lives into one: God's hammer struck the joint and made

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the welding true. Peace enters the soul and resignation into that which was His will.

By the side of the old, white-haired, and hollow-eyed man sits an old, white-haired, and hollow-eyed woman, crooning softly some old song.

X. THE TURN OF THE YEAR



UMMER is at an end when September appears. A great change is at hand.

Once before I have pointed out that summer and winter are the two seasons which will not yield to their successors without a fight, whereas fall and spring, as it were, lead over into winter and summer almost without any struggle at all. But winter is for us the most tenacious ruler: the one that holds on most obstinately even when his legitimate reign has been over for weeks.

On us the effect of these two major transitions, from winter to spring and from summer to fall, is exactly opposite. Spring we greet with affectionate anticipation: it is primarily the season of joy. But the fall of the year fills us with melancholy forebodings even though we enjoy the exhilarating crispness of the first few cold days. They are apt to be clear days, with hazy horizons, days of health for the healthy, the days of homecomings: days to be spent on nearby hills for last surveys of that which soon we shall see no more.

* * * * *

Three days of south-east windstorms, accompanied by warm, lashing rains passed over these forest marshes after having crossed the bay of the lake to the east of us. There

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were a few let-ups in the atmospheric turmoil, it is true; but the lake remained inalterably a picture of whipping fury, with its white-capped breakers rolling in upon the shore of the bay and there roaring over the sandbar of the beach which ordinarily protects the marshy pasture-land behind. Huge, dark, lowhanging clouds, their lower edges bordered by ragged, pendent curtains of mist, were scudding along below a leaden, windy sky; and when they reached us, they drenched us with flying, wet sheets of condensing vapour in which the large, heavy raindrops slanted at an angle of thirty degrees to the level surface of the ground.

And we knew that this was no longer a local phenomenon, or one in which nature merely re-established a lost equilibrium by a short, violent effort. This was the time in which we must expect "foul weather;" this was the time when rain turns chill and cold; and so, when at last it did come, it affected us in quite a peculiar way. We neither welcomed it nor rebelled against it: we were resigned. From the second day on, the sight of the sun had become a vision to be dreamt of, it is true, but a vision, so it seemed, never again to be realised.

When we went about the necessary business around the place, we did not expand to catch as much of the rain as we could—we did that in spring; we ran from building to building, bent over, even though we wore waterproofs, as

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if we wished to withdraw into the smallest possible volume, so as to offer the least possible surface to wind and rain.

Once, for a short period, the rain was interspersed with hail—still a sign that summer was not yet entirely gone; two or three times, in the beginning, thunder rolled, as if at a great distance, though it was by no means very far away: the clouds, layer upon layer, forming many chambers, acted as a muffler; and the continuous roar of wind and waves drowned out that voice which is the dominant voice in nature. But during the last two days the desolate dreariness of the wild—that which appeals to us as the peculiarly northern atmosphere of this country, bordering as it does upon the barren wilds—remained unbroken as if it could never again be relieved by anything as frivolous as sunshine and an unclouded sky.

The few people whom we saw during the week-end were interlopers from the city: poor, depressed, and almost lachrymose victims of our cavernous modern civilization. They complained because, having had a hot week of it on scorching pavements, they now found nature engaged upon serious business instead of decked out in her holiday attire, ready to receive visitors. To me it has always seemed that nothing is quite so disappointing as, when I have gone somewhere for the purpose of observing life and activity, to discover that by mischance I have stumbled upon a Sunday when half of life and all its activities are at rest. Thus

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it seems to me also that, were I a dweller in the caverns of the city, I should rejoice to find nature at her busiest work when I go out to visit her; but perhaps I am mistaken; for, living with her as I do every day and every night to boot, I do not know of such experience.

On the fourth day after the weather had broken, the clouds passed away; and what remained of them, dispersed into a high, whitish haze through which the sun was shining. The waters of the lake which the wind had piled high on this, the western shore—so that the level of the bay rose from twelve to fourteen inches—had receded and left the beach strewn with a strange assortment of litter. Huge logs had been thrown up by the waves and lay high and dry; lakeweeds formed miniature cliffs here and matted carpets there; rushes and shore-reeds were piled in tangled heaps, still green but soon to be bleached by thirsty winds and pitiless sun. Everywhere crows were squatting on that band of smooth sand which marked the edge of the beach that had been swept by the very tongues of the flattened waves; for there the myriads of fish that were caught in the surf—direst catastrophe for the tribes of the deep—lay dead, bared to the sun and awaiting the scavengers of the wild. The terns which during the days of the storm had hovered close in-shore to catch the wreckage of the lake before it expired on pebbles and sand flew far out again and spied for surface-swimmers. In the shallow

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pools behind the bar of the beach, bitterns stalked about—slough-pumps, the half-wild boys of the breed population called them, on account of their hollow call—looking for frogs and small fry. And high overhead swept the heron and circled the hawk, the two most imposing among our native birds.

The whole shore-bottom of the lake was changed; where it had been deep it was shallow, from sand piled in; and where it had been shallow, perchance an eddy or a whirl had swept out deep holes.

With surprise we noted all this for the hundredth time; as we also looked at the sun with almost incredulous eyes.

But our surprise still deepened, and a wistful look stole into our eyes as, above the beach, we climbed the gravelly ridge which is fringed with willows and looked out over the marshy pastures behind, towards the wall of forest that stands beyond the house and closes us in and shuts us off from the wide, wide world around. For a new note had crept into the symphony of greens; a hardly palpable change had come over it: the yellowish tinge of the balm had almost indefinitely and yet perceptibly greyed; the light emerald of the aspen had darkened; and the glossy green of the oak looked well-nigh black. Nearer by, to the right and left of us, the willows had many boughs

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stripped bare by the wind; and their tops were interspersed with yellow lines.

Nor was this local. The significance of the aspect was enhanced by the consciousness of the fact that it was country-wide. This three-day storm, coming as it did at this time of the year, had marked off the undisputed ascendancy of two seasons: summer was preparing to depart, autumn announcing his speedy arrival for a short, short revel on our fair earth.

A day or two later, at noon, an east wind started to blow, quite softly at first, but with ever increasing vehemence, till, during the small hours of the night, it developed into a furious blast which piled the breakers on the beach and sent them at last, towards four o'clock in the morning, with flying foam manes across the bar.

The night was still hollow and dark like a cave; the waning moon stood high in the eastern sky, faintly illuminating wind-torn and scattered shreds of cloud. Between them the stars were blazing in unheard-of numbers and with an almost incredible intensity.

There was a peculiar, strained, almost exaggerated quality about the rattle of loosened boards, the singing of fence-wire, and the whipping of ropes which had caused me to get up. But the moment I was outside, the roar of the distant breakers which sounded across the marsh from the lake drowned out all other noises. Over the

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gravelly yard sand scudded like low-drifting snow in winter.

For a while I lingered without any purpose; I simply wished to remain outside. Behind the house there stood a car in the open, covered merely with a canvas tarpaulin whose edges crackled as they fluttered in the wind. I busied myself—for a pretext—with tightening its ropes.

Still I lingered aimlessly. And meanwhile a grey-and-purple, wind-torn dawn arose. The rushing air pulled and snatched at my scanty garments. But suddenly, as if from nowhere, something like a purpose seemed to define itself; and instinctively I took the path down to the beach.

There the heavy, metallic roll of the waters held me motionless. It was a scene as if from a moment between dawn and morning in chaos. The reeds and rushes to the right were bent down, flush with the waves, as if struggling, with the help of the water, to hold their own against the furious onslaught of the air. The willows on the beach crest behind me were flattened down to quivering, billowy mounds whose outline scarcely suggested trees any longer.

And as I looked back at them, a new sight caught my eye.

Away in the west, beyond the marshy hayland, over the solid wall of the bush, another wall had arisen, higher:

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a wall of cloud, such as we see it in midsummer: but it was not solid. It was riven by lightning which revealed chamber above chamber of dark-grey cloud. It was not the grey of pretty contrast to the purple of the dawn; it was a grey of sinister darkness, an ominous grey; it was a threat, a vicious scream, a curse. It did not have that slow, determined, almost hesitating gait of the approaching storm in the month of July; it travelled at a tremendous speed, faster than anything human travels; and its path lay from the east to the west, directly against the prevailing surface blow. Inexorably it came, unescapably; and the fascination with which it held me partook of that strange exultation with which you bear up under a supreme disaster.

But the suspense did not last although for a moment or so it became nearly agonising. Then a hush, a lull came over all nature. Still, it is true, the waves ran high from the east, breaking and hissing and roaring over the bar. But the willows stood up, just swaying; the shore-reeds emerged from the water and lifted their heads above the foaming breakers that at this point were already half spent; the marshy lowland behind the beach seemed to breathe.

This lull, however, was of almost imperceptible duration; it was gone as soon as it had come.

For a moment the dawn was suddenly obscured; and

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then it was recast in the livid burst of a great flash of lightning. And in the very same fraction of a second the direction of the wind was reversed with a crash like the crack of a whip.

With a wild, bounding leap the wind sprang and tore through the forest, howling; it leapt the swampy plain, laid the willows low, and buried its teeth in the waves of the lake. It looked as if they reared up in a convulsion and almost in a disgust of pain; as if they staggered back and then flattened out, hissing and foaming in cringing abjectness before this ferocious assailant, vanquished. The assailant, meanwhile, wielded his hundred-tongued scourges of lightning—there either was little or no thunder, or it did not enter my consciousness—swinging them to right and left and lacerating the flanks of his writhing victim, the lake.

This did not last more than five minutes perhaps; and very likely it was less.

But there was something else in the impression. Something, I do not know what, seemed to indicate that the assailant was aware of the futility of his fury; it partook of that impotent rage with which a defeated army lays waste the land over which it marches although it is in full retreat.

Then a lull again; and once more the wind blew from the east as it had done before this seemingly catastrophic

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reversal. For half an hour or so rain fell in slanting drops, tremendous in size, but with no great frequency. Another half hour, and the sun shone again, like an apology almost, though the wind still blew with unabated fury.

This was Summer's struggle against defeat; Summer's rebellion against the very coming of a new ruler.

The afternoon of that day was sunny and warm, with the winds all hushed: of that kindly, melancholy, sympathetic, and retrospective warmth which is expressive of the leave-taking of those who have long been friends.

The wind had died down about noon; and soon the lake was bland and smooth once more, fawning at our feet with a thousand smiles. Summer had gained a specious victory; and although, with a melancholy kind of perspicacity, we saw and understood its speciousness, yet we accepted it gratefully enough.

Bracing and cool came the evening; but the night came with a chill. Two or three times during the hours of darkness tentative onrushes of wind blew over us from the north-west; and on the whole it was a night for rolling up in blankets and for sleep. Geese passed by with raucous honks; and all the dogs of the distant neighbourhood barked and howled: a fitting music to accompany the passing of the seasons. We dozed even though we heard it all and remembered it, too.

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In the early morning loose, flocculent clouds, resembling those that carry flurries of snow, sailed fast and far through a dark-blue sky of unfathomable profundity; and trees and shrubs stood humped and huddled under the biting breath of a bitter north-west. We being on the west shore of the lake, the wind merely curled the shallow lips of the water as if in play; no doubt the east shore, beyond the horizon, roared with hollow breakers.

Still the total impression of the landscape was that of greenness; but from the round, contracted domes of the bluffs, every now and then, a yellow leaf detached itself and hurtled along, nearly parallel to the ground, till it hit the lake where slowly it drowned and sank away to furnish food for future life.

Sky and lake both spoke of the sadness of the departing year; for this was at last what we had been expecting and anticipating: it was the fall. Summer still stood at the edge of the woods, casting back to us last, loving, but half reproachful looks and hesitating before he fled. There he lingered as if to make up for past violence and outbreaks of temper. Impulsively he might turn once more to bestow one final, short caress; and oh, how we love him when he is as good as gone! Our love, then, is equalled only and perhaps surpassed by that with which we welcome his young brother Spring when Winter has been lording it over us for long, dark, weary months.

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We are apt to have one or two cold and windy days at intervals now, interspersed with warmer periods; and when it warms up, it does so in the afternoon, under a clouding sky and with a dying wind. Trees, birds, and animals have done their summer's work. In that year of which I am telling, on the shore of the lake, we met everywhere, in the marsh, in the bush, in the willow-fringe behind the beach, and out on the very sand-slope, with young squirrels, young bitterns, young crows, and young gulls and terns that were grown-up now. The few thistles that were still in flower were the last of their clan; here and there a dandelion still bloomed low on the ground; asters, white as well as purple, still spangled the sides of our trails; and the fringed gentian, of a rare and royal blue, the latest and chastest of all our wild flowers, slowly opened its buds.

Then, on the evening of one of these warmer days, a subtle change came suddenly over the atmosphere and the landscape: something like a chill was running down the spine of the marshy meadows. When the wind had died, white vapours arose from the pools of stagnant water. In the north of Europe they say, "The wolf comes," when they see them. It is not the animal they mean but the ghostly wolf, the werwolf, the creature of mist and dew, the pursuer of him who travels far from home, far from

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friends and from shelter: of him whose blood he is going to suck.

As we stood on the porch and looked out, across the marsh, towards the willows, and, through the gaps in their fringe, on the lake which lay grey and cold but smooth like mercury, the shiver that ran over the waters here and there seemed to infect us, too, to run down our spine also; and a primeval impulse seemed to urge us: Turn back and hide! Hide in your caverns, like bear and badger, squirrel and skunk! Huddle close for warmth and protection: Life is dying: lie low till it re-awakes!

During that night a new wind sprang up, from the north this time; and towards morning it began to rain again. For the first time that year it was a really cold rain; but it was not heavy. Yet the air was filled with a penetrating dampness which made us draw our covers closer over our shoulders and back as we lay half awake through the gloomy dawn.

Next day, driving sheets of rain-dust kept sweeping over us from low-hanging clouds. It was not rain; it hardly seemed to fall: it was as if the hem of the cloud-garments were just brushing over us: yet it drenched us, and we shivered while we were out in the open air.

The horses when released from their stalls, ran about for a few minutes, galloped and kicked and capered over the yard; but as soon as they had satisfied their first desire

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for exercise, they stood crowded close together and watched for an opportunity to slip back into the warmth of the stables.

As far as we can see, north and south, along the shore, all the camps are gone: city-dwellers prefer wet pavements to melting roads.

We, however, linger as we always do. Nature to us is not a fleeting incident nor a brief recreation: it is the one great experience of our lives. The poplars are still green, though their leaves have darkened, hardened, and become brittle: but here and there an ash has turned yellow; and here and there a clump of dogwood slowly assumes its purplish, warmly glowing red. Like poplar, ash, and dogwood we linger and look. It is from choice that we do not close ourselves in and that we do not close winter out. We want to live life as it is; we want to react to all of what exists; and we want to measure our lives by the largest unit, by the slowest and mightiest pulse which nature provides. Does not the measure, if it be such, ennoble that which is measured, even though it be human only?

And thus October is ushered in.

The nights are still now, hushed as in expectation. Summer is gone: not even in bush or glade does he linger. In this interregnum of seasons the night is the most beautiful time: not a breath seems to stir then; and the

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air, though it is not clear, turns cold: radiation has no longer anything to do with that: often now the thermometer dips below the freezing-point.

But the soil of the ground and the water of the lake are still warm; and shortly after sundown they begin to steam. The hazes that arise come in three successive stages, forming a definite and repeating cycle.

The first morning he who gets up betimes and goes down to the beach before the sun wakes the world stands to half his height above the mist; and when the sun looks over the horizon, he has a ruddy glow shed over his head and shoulders. On the mirror-smooth waters the mist lies thick and low like a blanket; but the moment the warmth of the sun begins to tell a strange movement starts in the snow-white vapours. Wisps of them rise and form into threads which curl and creep over the glassy surface. It looks as if their lower ends were somehow held by it, as silken threads, when gently guided over rougher cloth, just touching it, adhere to the coarser fibres below. Their upper ends curve and coil like the finest hair on the head of a very young child. But as the sun climbs on his path, these wisps thin out and finally disappear; or rather, they become invisible to the eye; and once more the day turns out genial and warm, almost deceiving us with its air of a halycon "Indian" summer.

The second morning the mist has risen higher: just the

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tops of the tallest trees and the roofs of the highest buildings rise like islands above the vapour-sea. When we leave the house, we move about as in a gliding tent of half translucent curtains. All through the forenoon we cannot see the sun. Strangely, the very fact that the air is not transparent but only translucent gives an effect of infinite depth or height to the atmosphere: we know that the realm of the sun lies in the upper reaches of the firmament: and they seem very far above us, in a mysterious, otherworldly beyond.

The brittle leaves and the boughs of the trees are set with weirdly glistening beads of dew. This dew seems white: like the mist it is half opaque; for like it it consists of the smallest possible droplets; but in its whiteness there is a suggestion of opalescence.

About noon, on this second day of the cycle, we witness a fight between the sun and the mist; and not till then is it lifted anywhere, not even in patches. But at last it seems to ebb and to flow. And every now and then the sun becomes visible, white, looking like the ghost of its real self; till at last the mist rises, under the sudden impulse of a light but fitful breeze. In shreds it rises; the blue of the sky appears through the thinning sheets: like a divination at first, but defining itself here and there into azure islands of strange intensity amid the uncertain, blurred, only half outlined boundaries of the mist. And finally the mist turns

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into snow-white clouds which take wing and rise and sail away like flocks of enormous, loose-feathered, snow-white birds, still in strong contrast to the intense, almost ultramarine blue of the aerial deep. No longer does it become really warm, not even in the late afternoon; but the wind dies down, and the sun still befriends us as we sit on porch or veranda.

The third day dawns grey, dark, and cold; and though the haze is neither so white nor so opaque as the day before—though we can see the lake from the house—the mist reaches higher, it pervades the whole firmament, so it seems, and the horizon is very close by: that horizon where water and sky seem to blend. When we leave the house, we become aware, though it is not raining—that little bubbles of water float in the air; and gradually, almost casually, they settle down on all the things that offer them a surface. It is not quite a drizzle, not even a raindust; but it dampens us through and through and, with tiny white droplets, beads our hair and the woolly fibres of our clothes.

This time the mist disappears before an impetuous wind which whistles in the chimneys of the house and soughs with a hollow sound through the corners of the porch. In the bush, dry leaves flutter and run before it as in fear.

This cycle repeats for a week or two, according as it started early or late; and one day—it being the first of the three-day cycle—we awake into the brief, brief glory of the fall.

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The woods all around stand aflame in yellow, red, and brown. On a drier spot of the marshy lowland between the forest and the beach-fringe stands a small bluff of three or four poplars: strangely tall and pathetic they look in their brown-gold garment: like a protest they look against violation: like a trumpet-blast announcing the end. At the edge of the woods, behind the house, where dog-wood is piled into cushions against the poplars, crowding right up to them, all things are purple; and behind them rises a straw-yellow cliff, interspersed here and there with the chocolate-brown of the oak. On the side of the lake, in the east, the willows, too, stand pale-yellow, the paler the bluer the lake looks behind. Farewell, they whisper; soon, soon we shall stand in bare limbs like a fringe of brooms!

And the very next time the cycle repeats, the morning haze of the second day stands like a vault over bare boughs and fall-dry remnants of leaves on the trees; and boughs and fence-wires, and grass and weed tops are all around furred with white hoarfrost. The misty haze still lifts, at noon; and the hoarfrost melts; but the genial strength of the sun is gone; he glances down on us as from a greater distance and with an almost disapproving look.

Late at night we go down, as is our wont, to the lake; and this time we find what our neighbours, the Indians, call "thick water:." its surface is a slush of water and ice:

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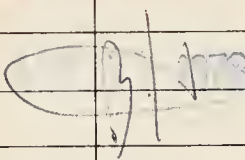
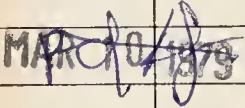

single crystals so far, not yet coalesced into a rigid blanket, but already impeding the water's motion when we test it by throwing a stone in: needles they are, some of them five, six inches long; and thin plates they are, paper-thin, soon to thicken.

And when we awaken the next morning, we look out from our windows into a thin, thin flurry of snow.

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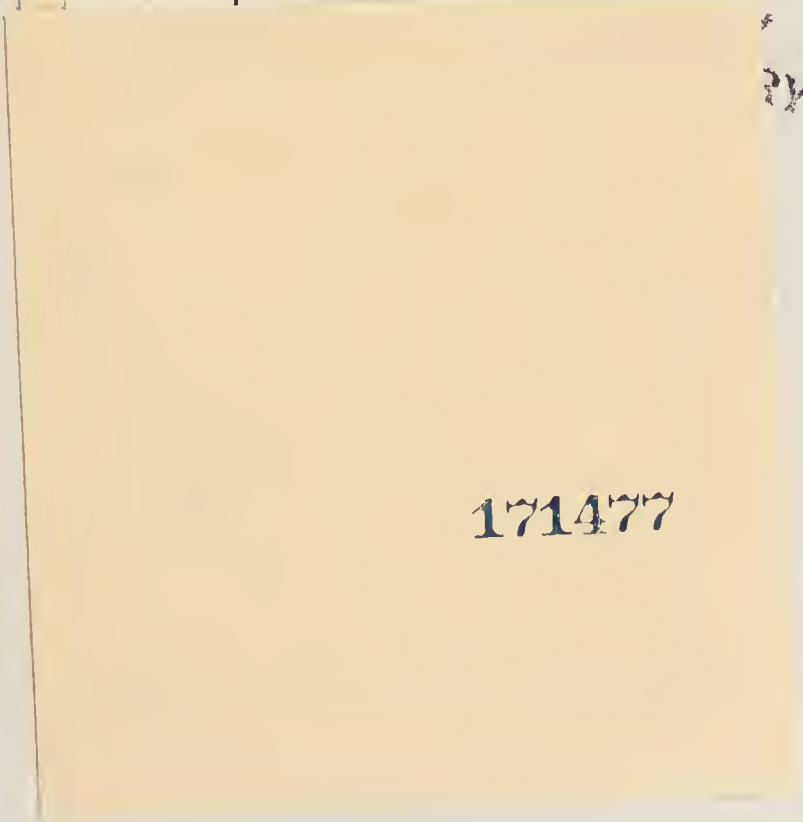
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